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BOSTON UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL
THESIS

THE PERSONALISTIC IDEALISM
OF EMILY DICKINSON

Submitted by

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(B.R.E., Boston University 1928.)

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Master of Arts
1930

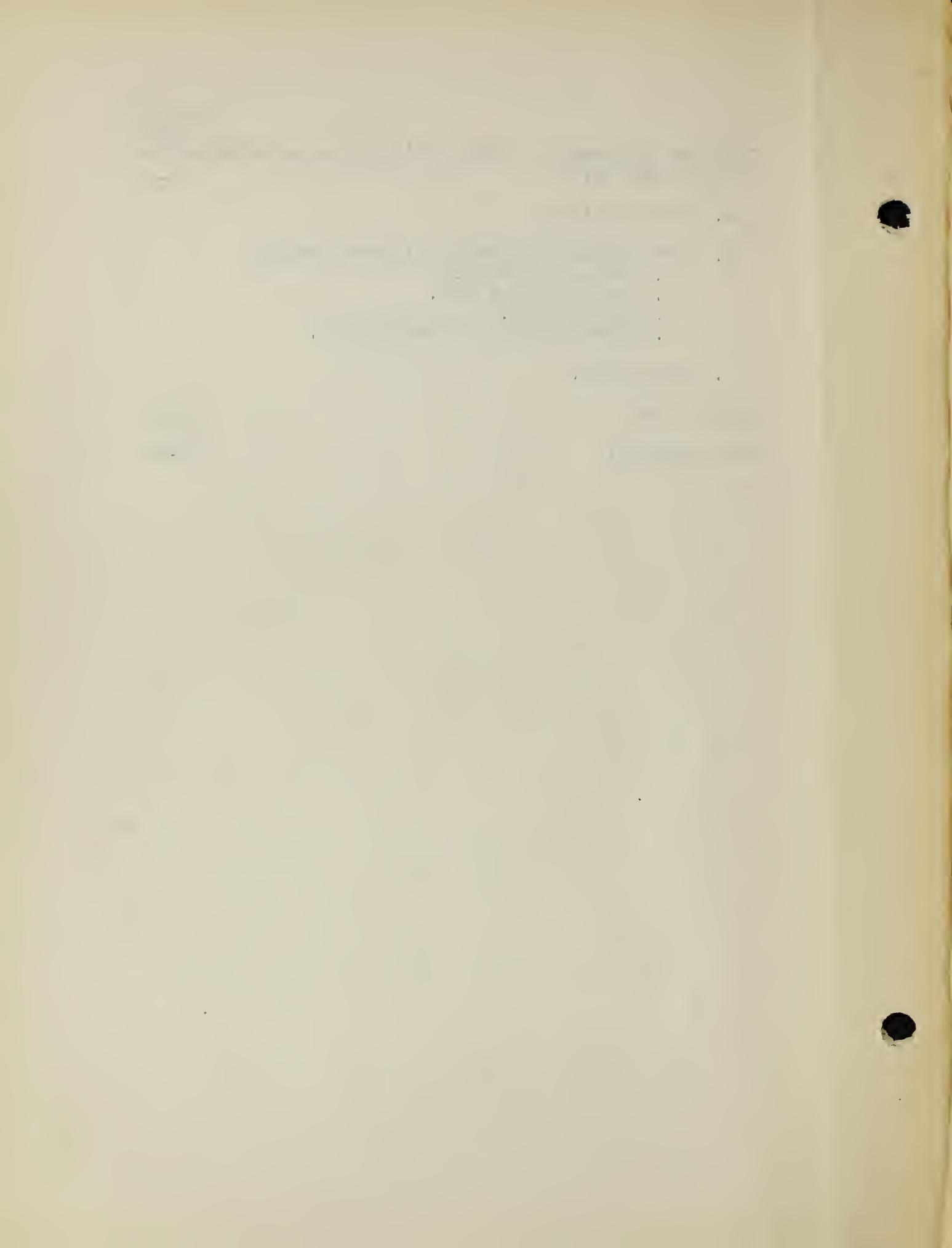
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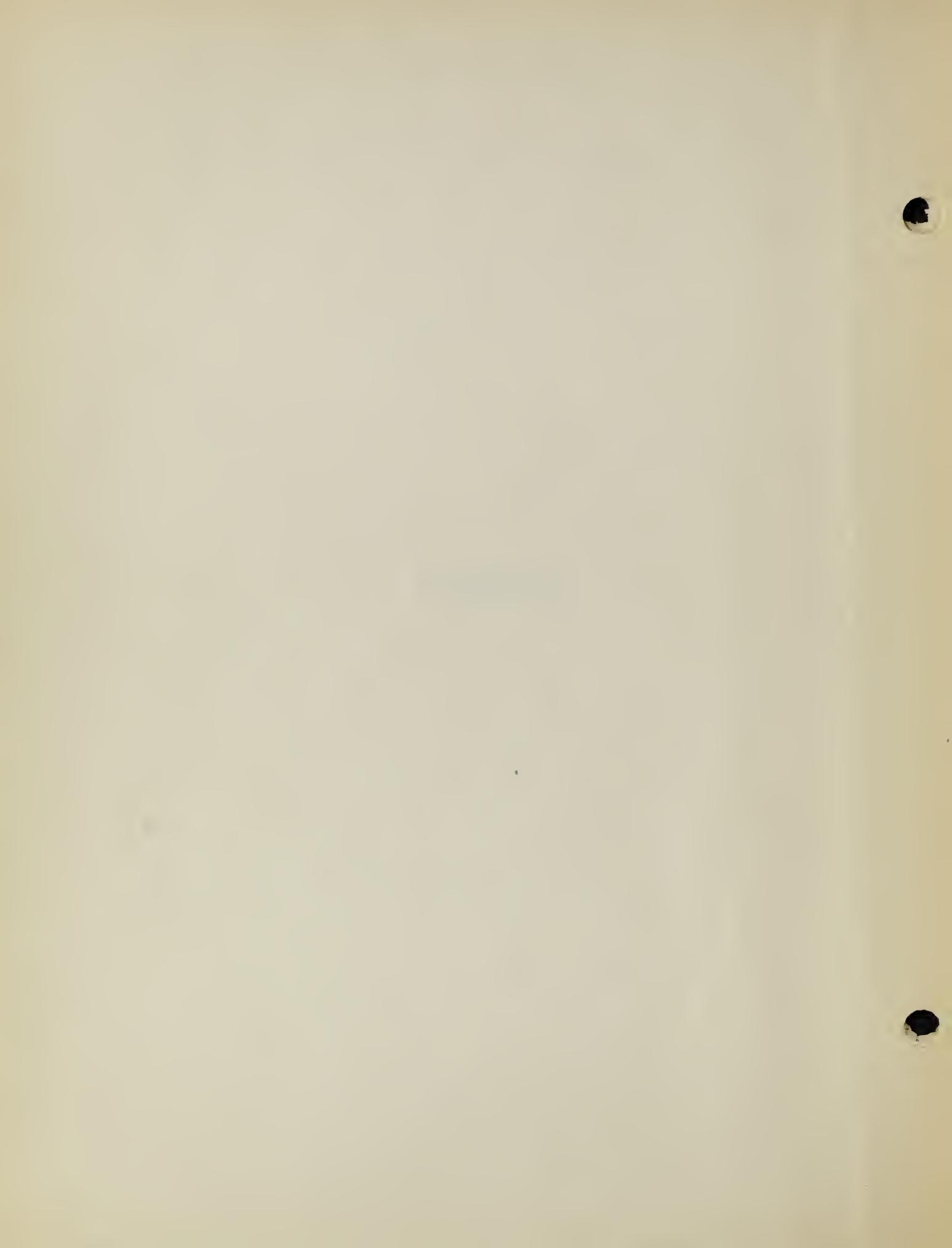
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INTRODUCTION

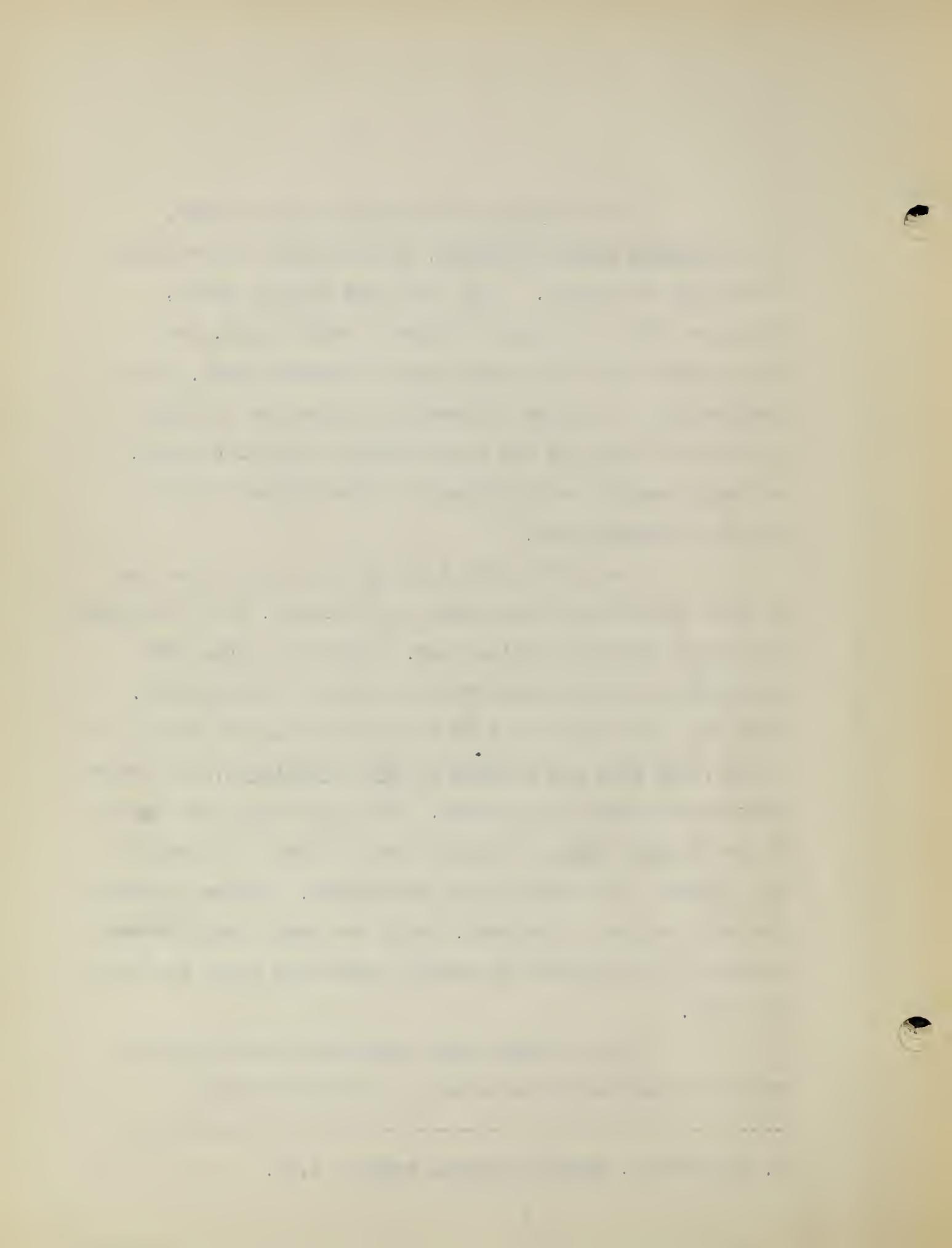


It is significant that Louis Untermeyer, in his Modern American Poetry, should begin his anthology with Emily Dickinson. This quiet New England woman, living a life of seclusion almost a century ago, has been called the finest woman poet of modern times. Her importance as a figure in American literature is noted by the fact that she has been styled a "feminine Blake," an "epigrammatic Walt Whitman," a "New England mystic," and the "American nun."¹

She wrote without thought of publication and in fact ordered that her poems be destroyed, but fortunately her wishes were not carried out. Her chief poems were published in the nineties but her readers remained few. With the publication in 1924 of Martha Dickinson Bianchi's volume, The Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson, she leaped into international prominence. The appearance this Spring of her Further Poems, which had been formerly withheld by her sister, was received with enthusiasm. Praise regarding her work has been unbounded. Many reviewers and numerous articles have appeared in current magazines about her life and work.

It is strange that, although Miss Dickinson wrote in the nineteenth century, yet she is rightly

1. Untermeyer, Modern American Poetry, P.32.



considered one of the modern poets and is a forerunner of the new spirit, showing freedom of expression, unhampered choice of subject and penetration in psychology.

She concealed her mind and her person from all but a very few friends. Only a few of her poems were printed during her lifetime. In a letter to Colonel Higginson, she describes herself as follows:

I am small, like a wren; and my hair is bold like the chestnut burr; and my eyes, like the sherry in the glass that the guest leaves.¹

He says of her,

The very originality of her personality, which charms most readers, may, like the roughness of form, repel a few. Her grace and winsomeness of mind, her beauty of soul everyone must feel.²

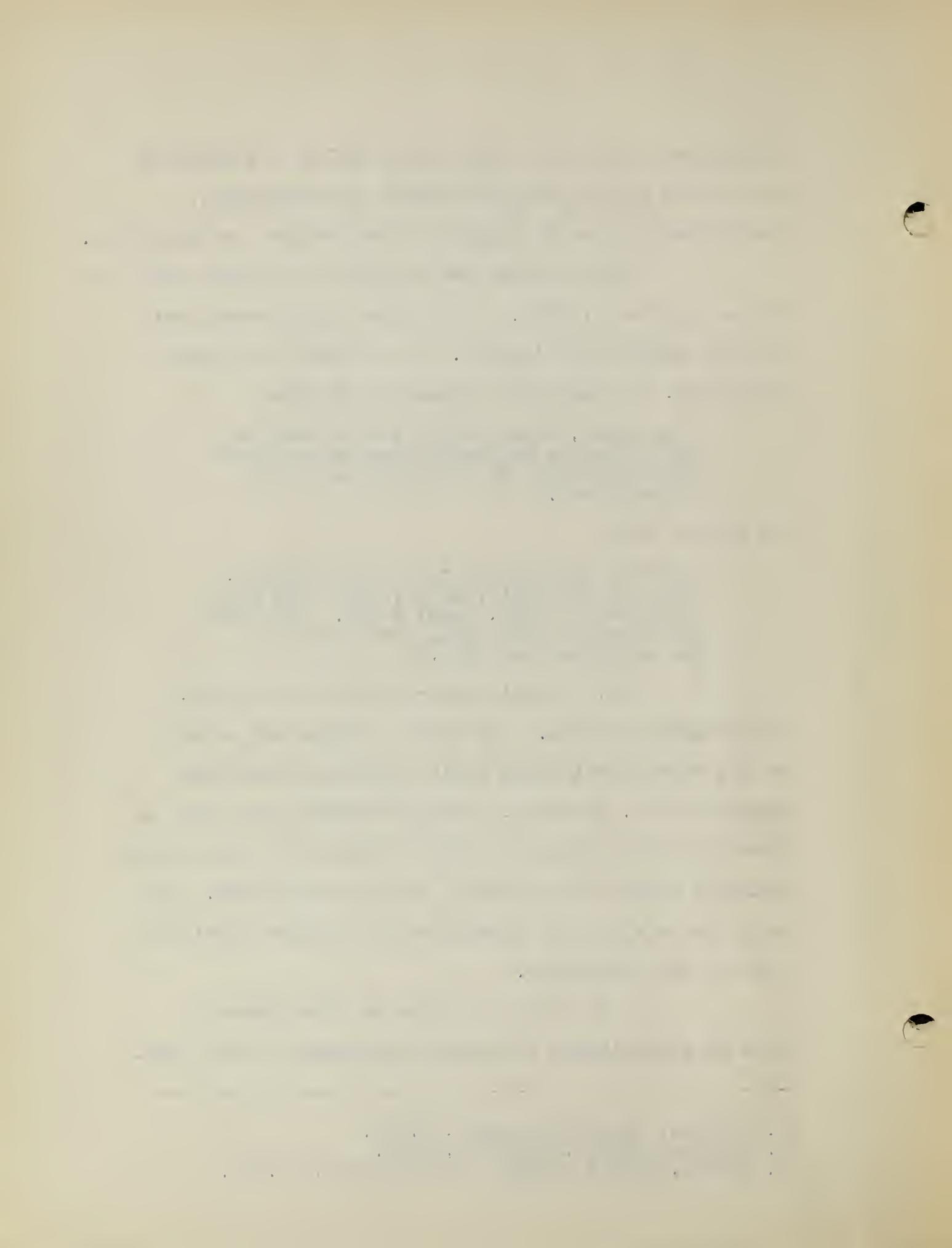
Mrs. Bianchi speaks of her as a mystic, philosopher and poet. Amy Lowell classes her as one of the three great women poets of genius along with Sapho and Mrs. Browning.³ Louis Untermeyer says that there is little doubt but that her work will last longer than the work of the majority of this generation. As such she is worthy of consideration from the point of view of her philosophy.

It is not the purpose of this thesis to give an appreciation or literary appraisal of her work,

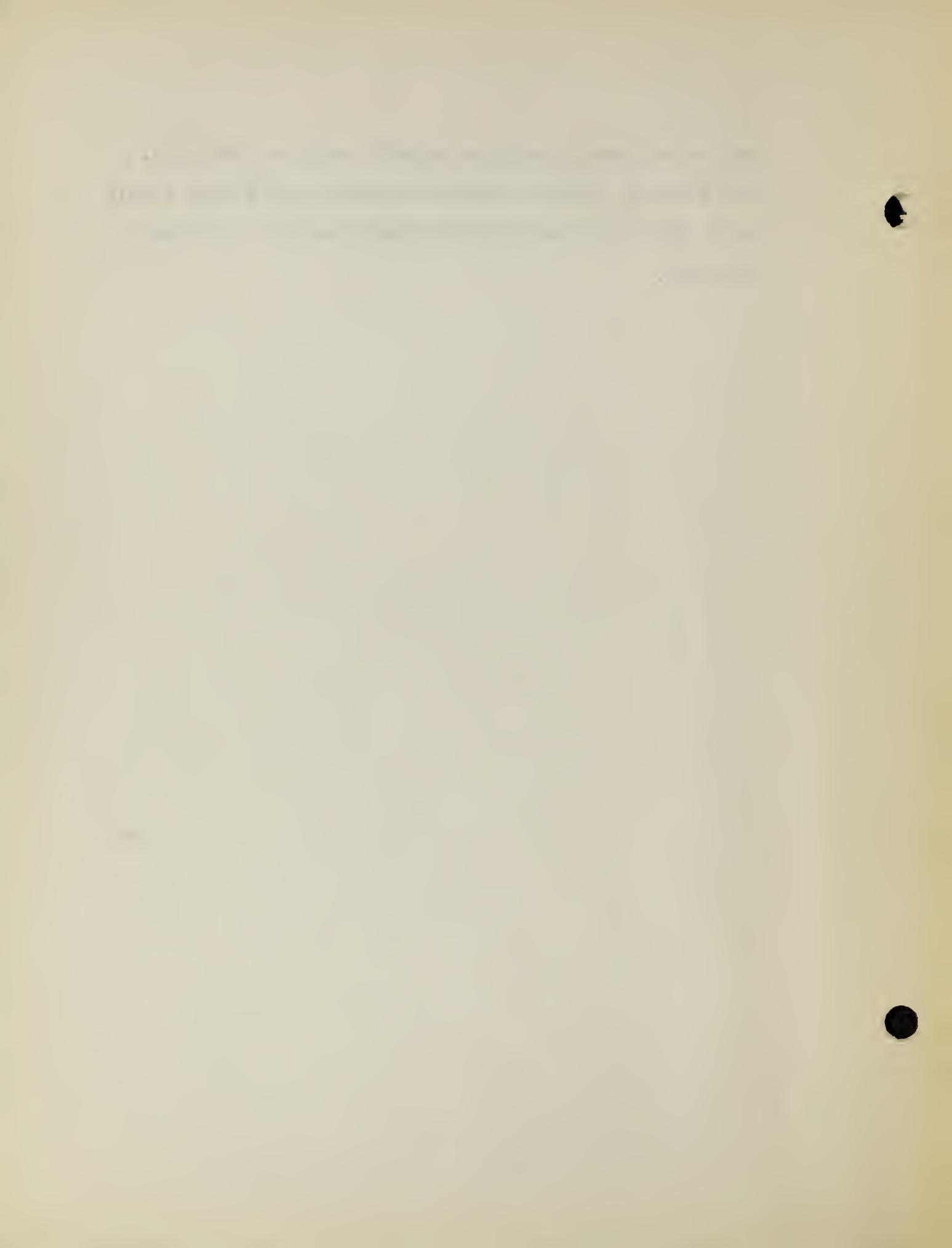
1. Bianchi, Life and Letters, P.241.

2. Literary Digest, August 2, 1924.

3. Lowell, What's O'Clock, "The Sisters," P.127.



but to discover through a careful study of her life, her letters, and her poetry the facts which will enable us to prove that as a philosopher she was a personal idealist.



CHAPTER ONE
PERSONALISTIC IDEALISM



In order to discover whether or not we are correct in calling Emily Dickinson a personalistic idealist in her philosophy, it is necessary to know something of the background of personalism and to give it an adequate exposition. This then is the purpose of the first chapter.

The supreme duty of philosophy is simply an attempt to give an account of experience; it is one's way of looking at things. As Bowne says:

INTRODUCTION

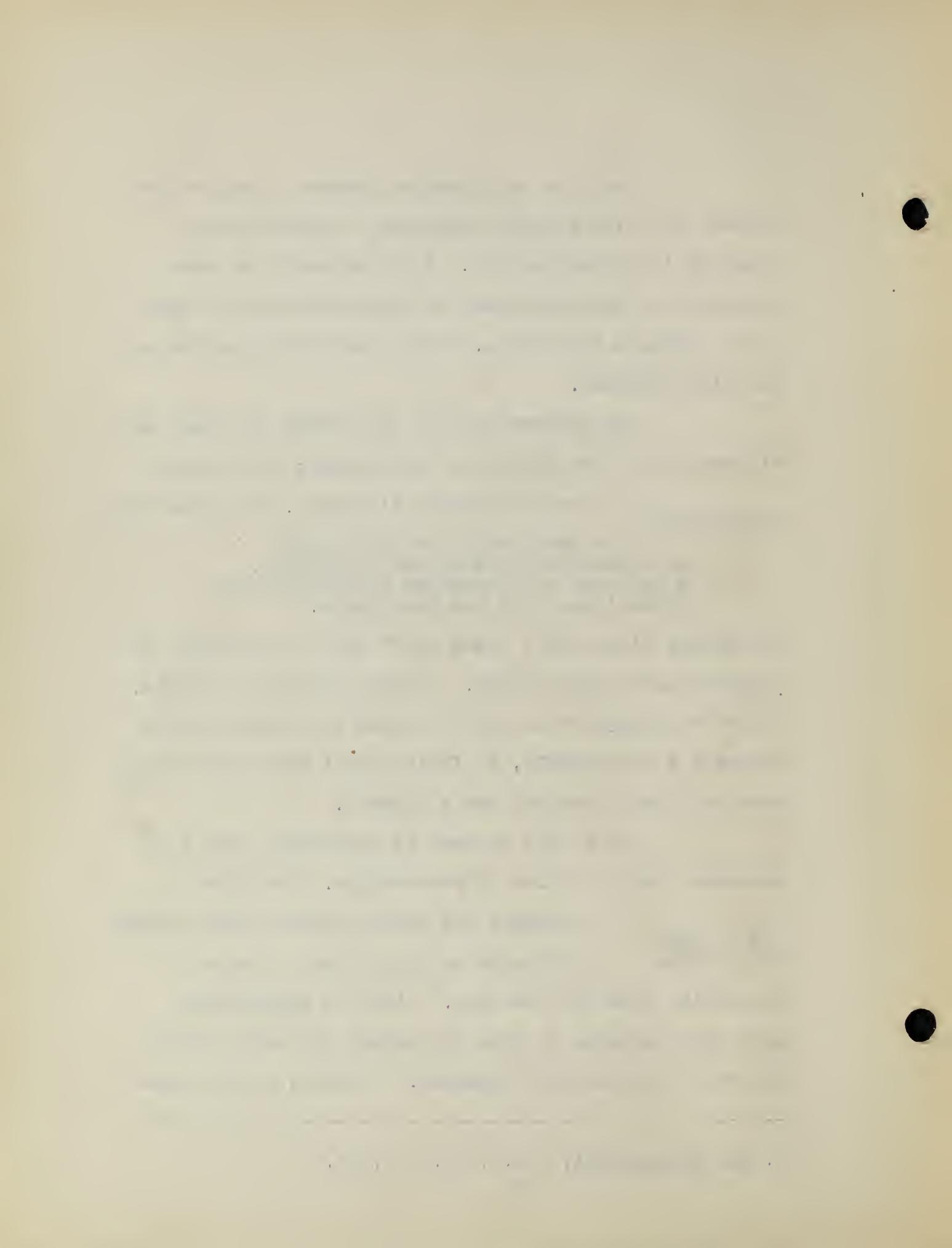
It does bring out into clear consciousness our aims and principles. In this way it formulates principles and systematizes life and experience.¹

Philosophy gives one a "long look" and is an attempt to discover and define values. It sees things as a whole. Since one struggles in life for what he believes to be worthwhile or valuable, it follows that one's philosophy does and should control one's conduct.

One of the systems of philosophy that is prominent today is that of personalism. Its chief

USE OF TERM PERSONALISM exponent was Borden Parker Bowne, former professor of philosophy in Boston University from 1876 to 1910. His book Personalism gave fresh impetus to this philosophy but before 1908 the word "personalism" appeared. In fact, Goethe spoke

1. The Personalist, Vol. 3, No. 4, P. 254.

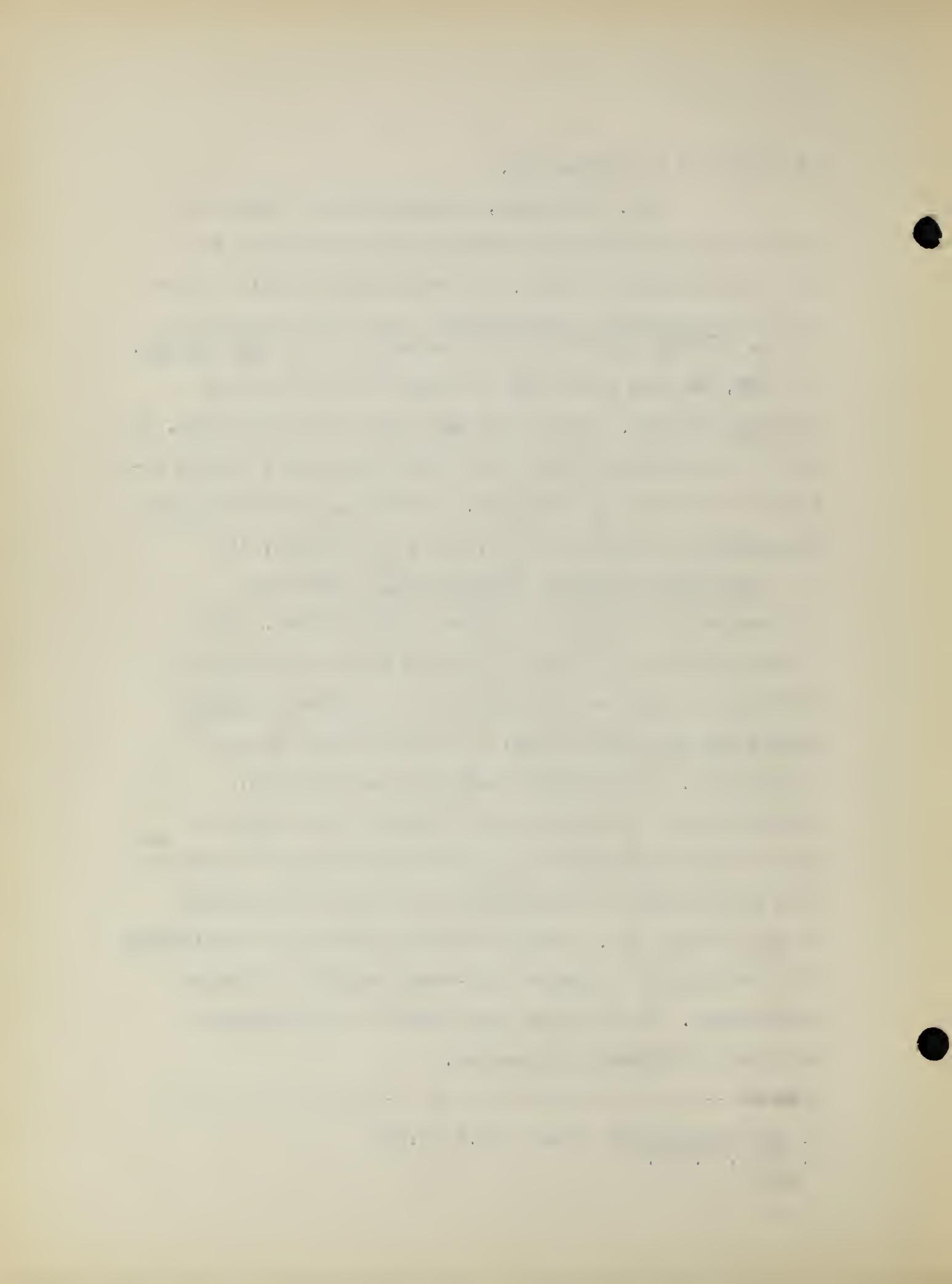


of Jacobi as a personalist.

Dr. Brightman, in an article on "The Use of the Word Personalism," states that personalism is good philosophical German. Witness Hans Dreyer's little book, Personalismus und Realismus, and the frequent use of the term in Rudolf Otto's remarkable book, Das Heilige.¹ In 1903, Charles Renouvier published a book entitled Le Personalisme. Since Bowne gave the Harris Lectures, in 1907 at Northwestern University that has been a marked increase in the use of the term. Leighton, in his Field of Philosophy, mentions the term, and Miss Calkins, in her Persistent Problems of Philosophy, notes that personalism is tending to replace spiritualism. That it has not been confined to followers of Bowne alone is indicated by the fact that Sorley's position in Moral Values and the Idea of God, is characterized as pure personalism. Creighton's mention of materialism, pantheism, and personalism as "rubrics under which we classify the historical systems of philosophy,"² indicates that personalism is considered one of the philosophies of the present day. The personalist movement in philosophy is attaining to a greater self-consciousness and wider recognition. It is being sanctioned by distinguished scholars of England and America.

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1. The Personalist, Vol. 3, No. 4, P. 254.
2. Ibid, P. 259.



The name personalism implies a philosophy which makes personality central and basic, and which interprets

DEFINITION OF PERSONALISM reality in personal terms. It is a form of idealism. Personalism holds that "life is deeper than logic" and lays its stress on the primacy of the will rather than the intellect.¹

Personalism asserts a system of selves related through a supreme personality. It conceives of the supreme person as existing in and through the concrete continuous exercise of his personality, thinking, willing, and sustaining all things.²

Since personality is basic in personalistic philosophy it is worthwhile to note that Dr. Knudson mentions four elements in personality: first, individuality, which includes unity and identity; second, self-consciousness, in the sense of the power to know as well as to feel; third, will or free activity; and fourth, dignity or worth.³ Personality is the organizing, systematizing, and synthesizing principle in the universe.⁴

A person is his whole history from the cradle to the grave and many personalists hold beyond that into PERSONALISTIC VIEW OF MAN immortality. "A person is a system of events."⁴ "A self is any conscious experience or process taken as a whole and as experiencing

1. Knudson, Philosophy of Personalism, P.67.
2. Article, "Personalism," Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, P.771.
3. Knudson, Philosophy of Personalism, P.83.
4. Mariatt, What is a Person, P.9 and 10.

itself.¹ The identity of a person persists through constant and innumerable changes. A person is a complex of many traits held together by something which gives cohesion and identity. It is a unified individuality unlike any other. Each person is entitled to live a private life. Leighton says that "a self lives and is conscious only in relation to other selves and to physical things."² The self is a unique individuality. Words are symbols by which you communicate inner ideas and hopes. Taste, sight, and sense experiences help you to know a person. Whether or not you know a person depends on the range of experiences, some of which cannot be rationalized. The spiritual "I" meets with another, and they mingle; like is satisfied with like in these interpersonal relations. It is knowledge plus spiritual immediacy which is indescribable that gives one knowledge of a person. The experience is complex rather than simple.

A large part of the human life is invisible. We are known only through our deeds. The physical self is only a means of expressing the inner life which is as formless and invisible as God himself. By building your complex into that of others you find their experiences help to deepen and enrich your own life. This gives life a drive and dynamic it otherwise would not have.

1. and 2. Brightman, An Introduction to Philosophy, P.193.
2. Marlatt, What is a Person, P.11.

It extends your horizon and makes you see far beyond your own little world. Thus our friendships enlarge our vision and help to keep us from being self-centered.

A person is a well-organized, reflective or rational individual. While unique and private in its inner experience, it realizes the worth of true existence by transcending its mere selfhood and living in universal relations to nature, its fellow-men and God. A person is a spirit, an individual self containing the potentiality of personality. It is natural to believe that the self is the real cause of the sense of initiative, responsibility, seeking, choice, and purposiveness which characterize the normal individual.

We have thoughts, feelings, and volitions which are inalienably our own. We also have a measure of self-control and power of self-direction. However we cannot regard ourselves as self-sufficient and independent. That all things depend on God is a necessary affirmation of thought, but that all things, thoughts, and actions are divine is equally a negation and both unintelligible and self-destructive.

There is a permanent, intelligent, and purposive principle of action which is the real self. Obstacles are surmounted and apparently alien and stubborn materials are transmuted into instruments of achievement.

Our aspirations, longings for freedom, our desire to rise superior to circumstances and not be overwhelmed by them whatever their nature may be, our courage, our hope, all these are subjective aspects of that great struggle for liberty which we call evolution.

It is the struggle of spirit within us to escape the trammels of matter, to secure a fuller individual life and larger freedom.¹

Man is indeed in the making. He is not yet made, he will become more and more like God until he will one day be "filled with the fulness of God."

A world of persons with a supreme personality at the head and not a mechanistic world is one in which ~~T~~ ~~THE PERSONALISTIC~~ ~~VIEW OF THE WORLD~~ the personalist believes. Nature is established and maintained by an ever loving and ever acting Intelligence and Will. Nature is the function of the will and purpose of an ever present God.² The world the personalist believes in is an order of ends...a cosmos. To believe in a purposive world logically leads one to believe in a world Purposer...One who plans and carries out world purposes. If the world is purposeful and individual, it is most natural to suppose that it is subject to the guidance of a directing Mind,...a supreme Intelligence, without which the world would be simply a jumble of

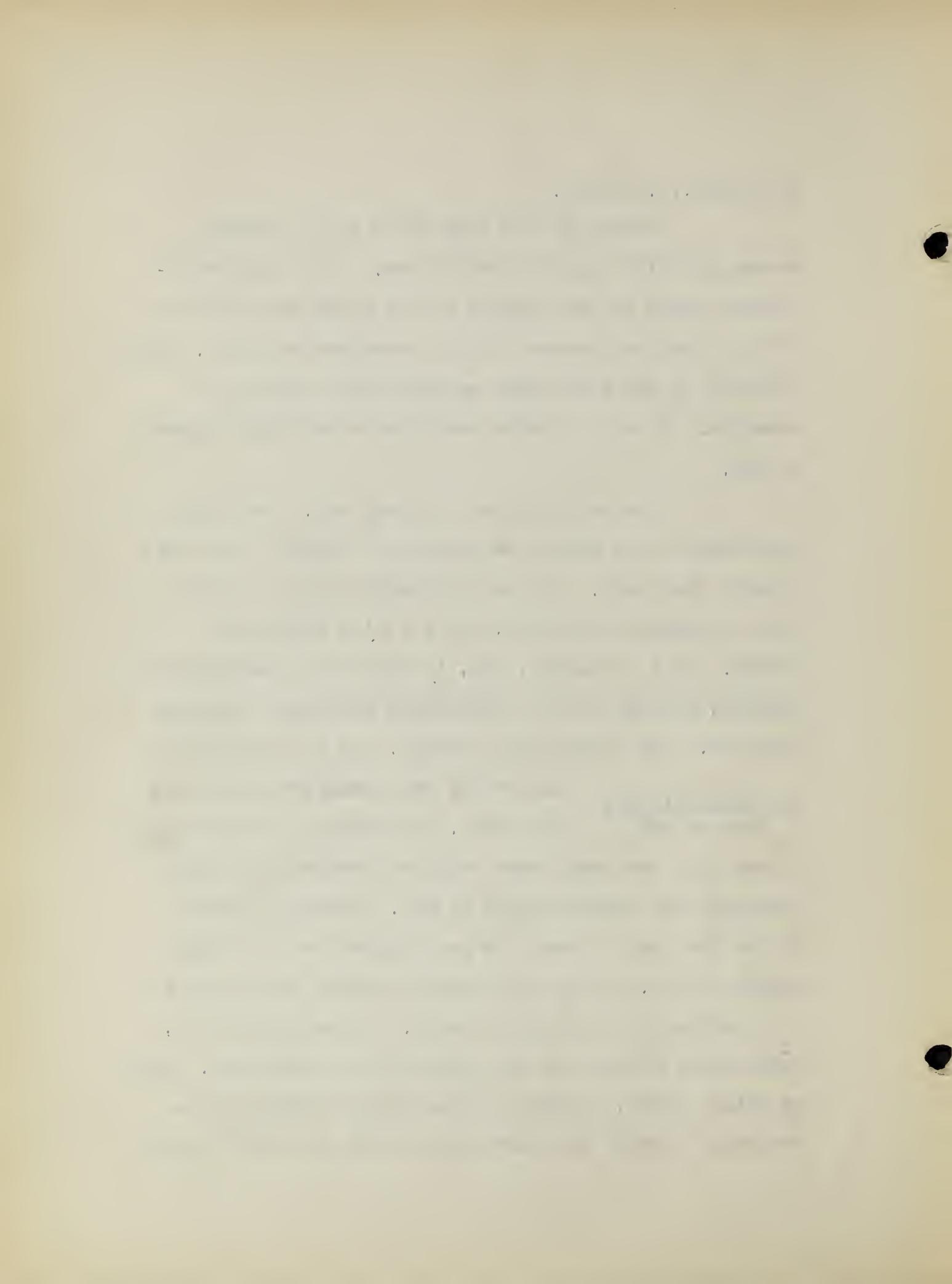
1. Mathews, "Road of Evolution," Yale Review, January, 1922.
 2. Bowne, Personalism, P.319.

incidents....a chaos.

Nature is the form under which supreme Reason and Will manifest themselves. God is the ever-present agent in the ongoing of the world and nature is but the form and product of his ceaseless activity. God's activity in the world does not stop with the end of creation. We are in God's world and everything depends on him.

God is in all and through all. He is not exhausted by his manifestations but is beyond them and greater than they. To the personalist God is not far off, an absentee landlord, but a loving Father and Friend. He is a person, who, in order to accomplish his purpose, created us and established personal relations with men. God is one and ultimate. He is a being who

THE PERSONALISTIC VIEW OF GOD is creator and sustainer of all our existence. The notion of personality is the only one that seems best to correlate both the immanence and transcendence of God. However, spirit is the best way in which we can express the essential nature of God. He is the highest, purest inner nature in ourselves which we call spirit. He is intelligent, purposeful, devoted to the realization of the good. When we think of God, we mean all that can be expressed in the word "person" and vastly more than our word "person"



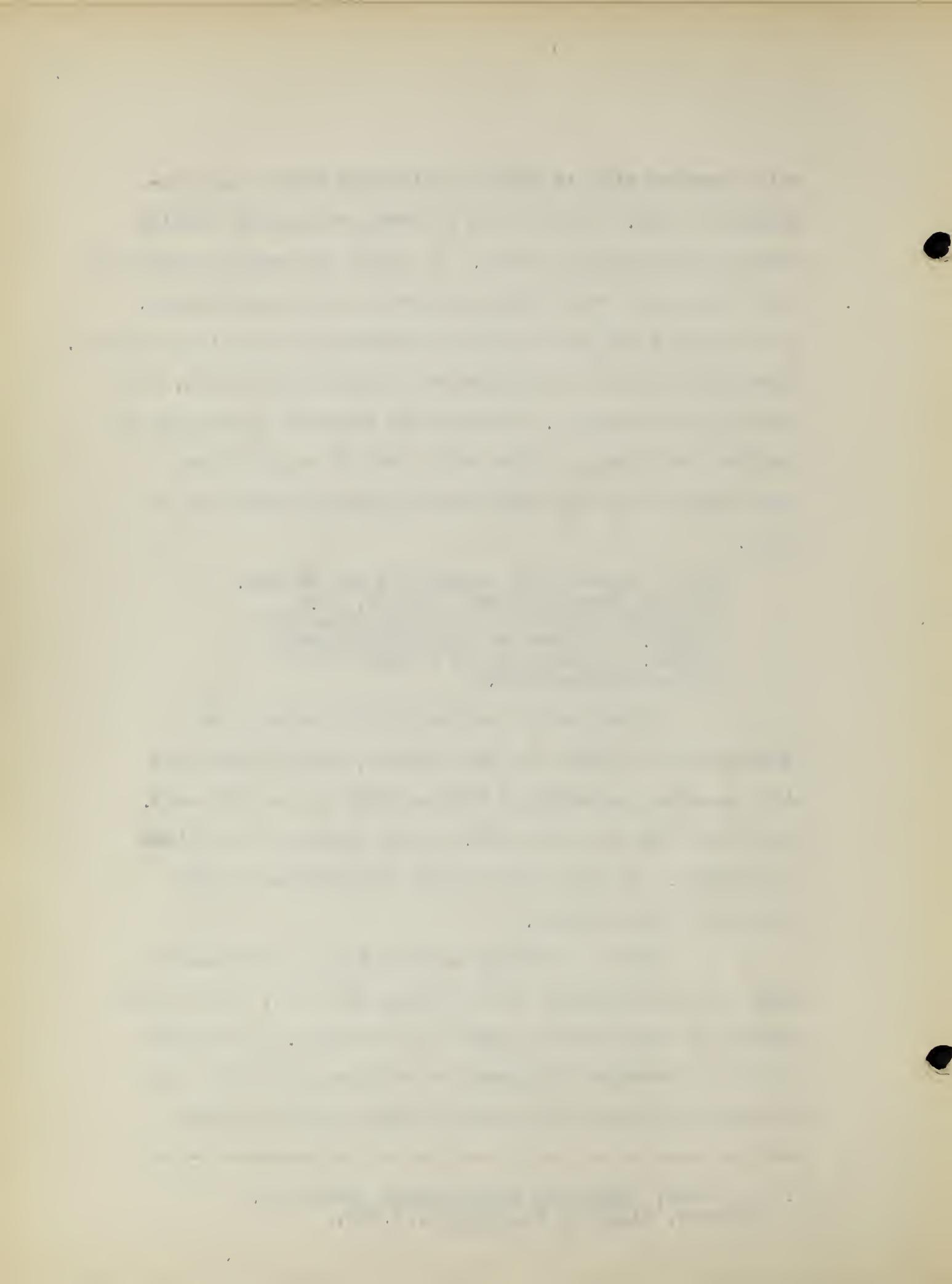
which carries with it human limitations which cannot be applied to God.¹ God is the supreme personality working in and through other selves. In order to create personality there must have been something greater than personality. It is personality that gives the world order and intelligence. Since personality is the greatest thing in the world, God must have personality. Personalism believes thoroughly in the idea expressed in John 4:24, "God is a spirit and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

God is immanent in human life and nature. He is a super-personal reality, the absolute being who is the ground of all things. He lives by imparting himself to men. His essence is creative and self-imparting love.²

A personalist believes that there is an immanent and friendly God who created, perpetuates, and will conserve the world of values which is the universe. God is with us, he is for us, and he helps us to achieve our highest. God is a free spirit ministering to the welfare of free spirits.

There is nothing outside God in the sense of being fully independent of his being and will. God limits himself in giving us the power of free will. The spirit of God is therefore conceived as working in and through the spirit of man, but in such a way as not to destroy

1. Cf. Jones, Religious Foundations, Chapter I.
2. Leighton, Field of Philosophy, P.419.

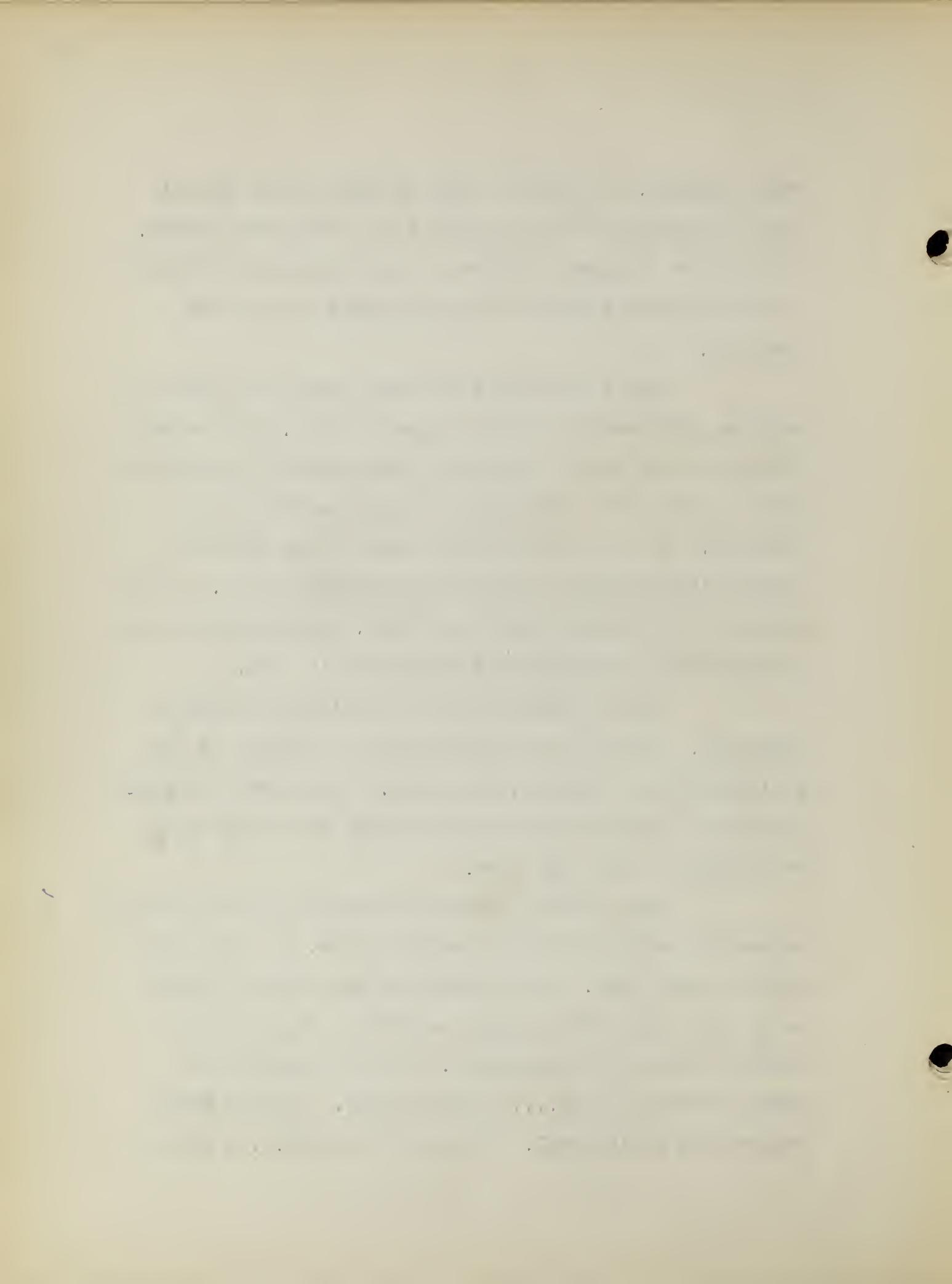


human freedom. The God of theology made rules for men and punished their transgressions as a mediaeval despot. God must be supremely good as it is impossible to worship a being who falls below our human ideals of love and goodness.

God's providence involves failure as well as success, sickness and health, loss and gain. One cannot comprehend the mystery of his way and yet one may believe that it is God who works in us to will and to do his pleasure. It is not against the laws of the mind but through them that God realizes his purposes in us. It is necessary to work for spiritual bread. We ourselves must discover the divine presence and agency in life.

The active will of God is being expressed in many ways. There is the constant inner presence of God as Illuminator, Inspirer, and Guide. God is ever present and active in man as the persuasive and sustaining power of goodness, truth, and love.

The physical organism is only an instrument for expressing and manifesting the inner life, but the living self is never seen. In the same way God serves through us to bring about his kingdom on earth. Personalists usually believe in immortality. "Faith in immortality rests on faith in God....if God be good. Somehow human beings must be immortal. To promise so much...to raise



such hopes and then frustrate them...to endow us with such capacities that are never to be fully used...to instil in us a love for others, all of whom are to be annihilated - is unworthy of God."¹

Edwards states:

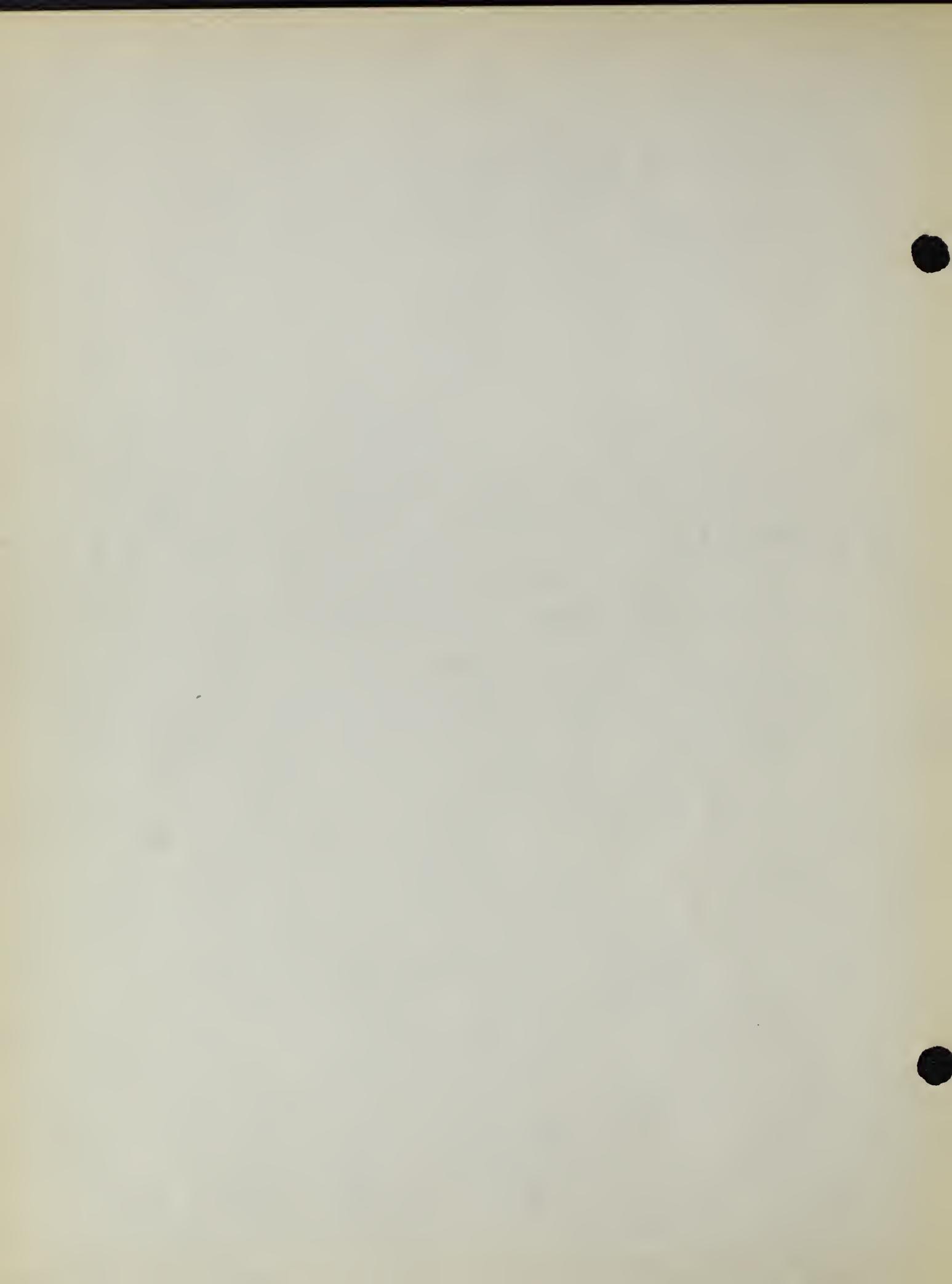
The highest kind of unity is a unity of a society of souls realizing their highest destiny in love and mutually enriching fellowship, a fellowship which is only possible where each has a unique inner life of his own and respects the individuality of others, yet where each not loses but finds himself in others. God we regard as the inexhaustible creative source of all being, but not identical with the world in which he is immanent, who is the ultimate fountain of all resources and power.²

Personalism then is that system of philosophy that asserts a system of selves or individuals related through a supreme Personality in whom CONCLUSION "we live and move and have our being."

Although Miss Dickinson lived before the modern development of personalistic philosophy, yet if she agrees with the principles of personalism we are correct in considering her a personal idealist.

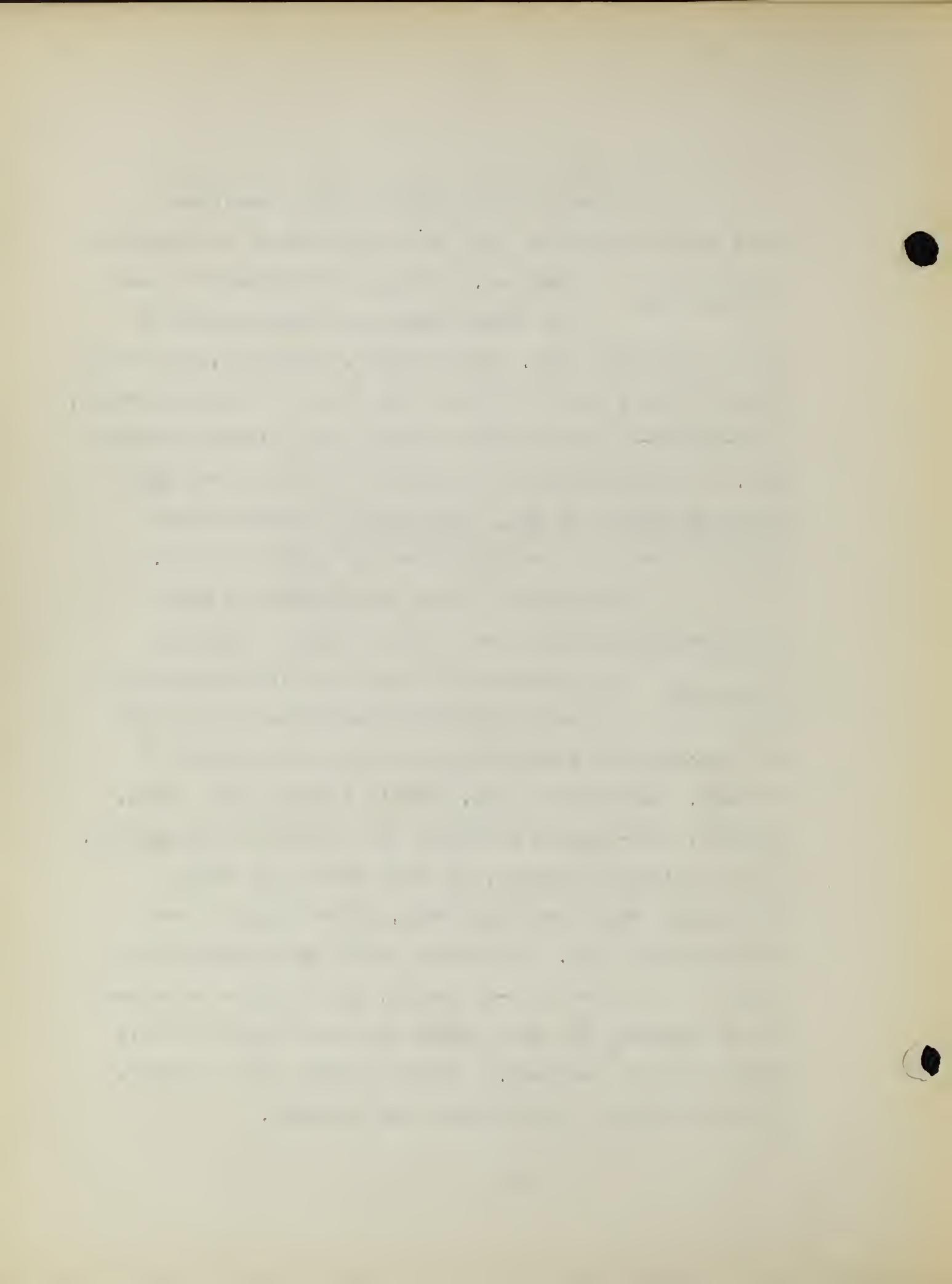
1. Brightman, An Introduction to Philosophy, P.349.
2. Edwards, The Philosophy of Religion, P.298.

CHAPTER TWO
THE PHILOSOPHY OF EMILY DICKINSON
AS REVEALED
IN HER LIFE



In the preceding part of this thesis we have endeavored to lay down the principles of personalistic idealism. We shall now attempt to show INTRODUCTION how these ideals were demonstrated in Miss Dickinson's life. This chapter, therefore, will deal largely with a brief sketch of the life of this fascinating, much-talked-of New England poet who lived almost a century ago. The biographical material used is taken from The Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson by Martha Bianchi and articles in current magazines by various authors.

There is nothing in the ancestry of Emily Dickinson that might account for her genius, although her heredity is traced for nine generations BACKGROUND in America and her grandfather made a trip to Boston to see about getting a charter for Amherst College. Edward Dickinson, Emily's father, was a stern, austere, well-dressed gentleman and a lawyer by profession. He was a typical Puritan, and when Emily said or did anything of which he disapproved, he would get up and walk silently away. Her mother was an exquisite little lady of a fine, well-to-do family, but rather overshadowed by her husband, who even signed his love letters to her, "your most ob't servant." Emily's family life, however, was affectionate, intelligent, and pleasing.

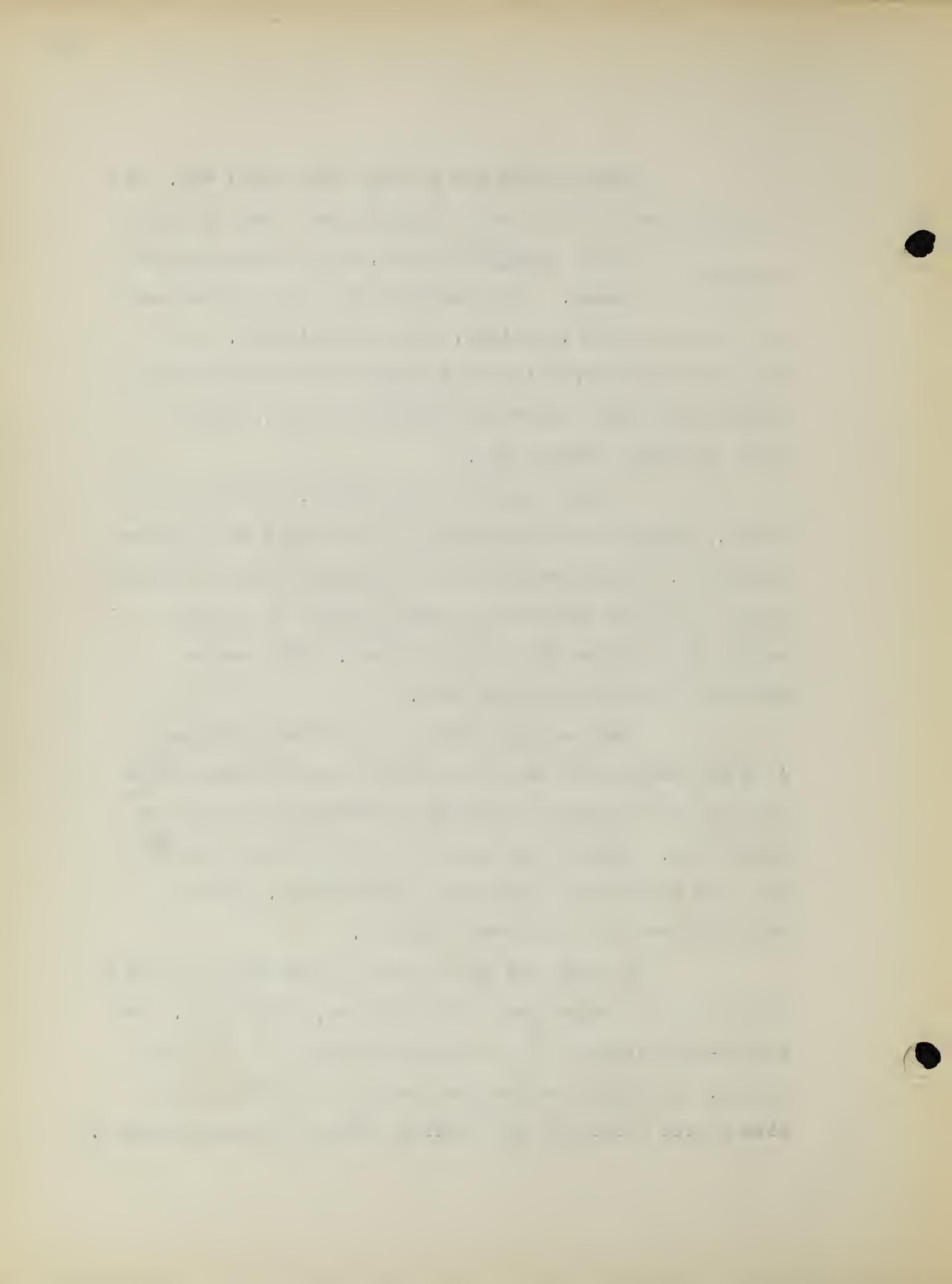


Her girlhood was a happy and normal one. She was pretty and winning and, although she liked solitude better than ^{most} most girls, she enjoyed girlish GIRLHOOD pranks. Her playmates were her brother, and her younger sister, Lavinia, and Susan Gilbert. The last mentioned moved into the neighborhood when she was sixteen and later became her brother's wife, and her most cherished "Sister Sue."

A story is told of how Emily, a girl in her teens, having dutifully attended the funeral of a remote kinswoman, stepped away from the graveyard with a dashing cousin and came home in his hansom buggy, by a route seven miles longer than was necessary. This was a startling episode in those days.

When she was attending the Female Seminary in South Hadley she was sent home by the afternoon stage because she refused to observe Christmas in fasting and meditation. She was the only one of the entire student body who refused to comply with the request. Matters were adjusted and she later returned.

She sent one man a poetic valentine containing such clever nonsense that it is amusing, even today. Her school-girl letters to her brother are full of fun and spirit. One night she sat on the door step and talked with a girl friend in the twilight about love and marriage.

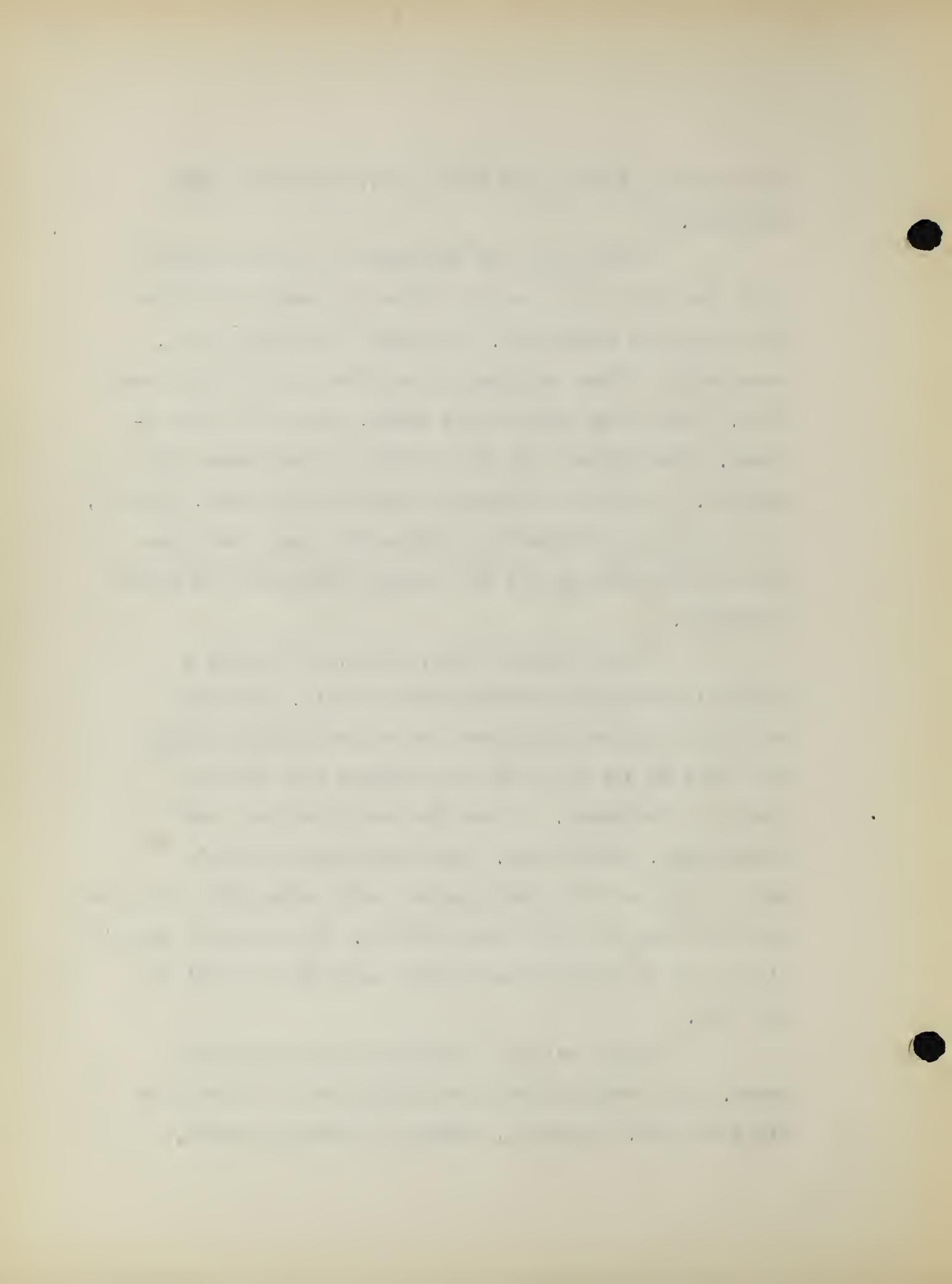


just as many other girls have done, before and since that day.

When Emily was eighteen her father decided that she could continue her studies at home as befitted the custom in those days. She made the family bread, because her father declined to eat that baked by any one else. Emily also made choice cakes, puddings, and ice-cream. She followed the activities of their hens with anxiety. It was her sister Lavinia who was noted, however, for the resourcefulness with which she could serve the unexpected guest and was the one who heartened the whole household.

When Austin's wife, Susan, arrived as a bride at Amherst she created quite a stir. She was accused of metropolitan ways and of worshiping strange gods because she decorated the windows with holiday greens at Christmas. It was the town, however, that surrendered, and not Sue. Susan recognized Emily's genius from the first and hoarded every scrap Emily sent her from the time they were both sixteen. She received Emily's first poem in 1848 and encouraged her work the rest of her life.

Emily was well known for her extravagant humor. One evening guests had driven over to spend the night and Mrs. Dickinson, anxious for their comfort,



offered one suggestion after another until her daughter,
exasperated by repetition, cried,

O? Mrs. Holland, don't you want to hear
me say the Lord's Prayer? Shouldn't
you like me to repeat the Declaration
of Independence? Shan't I recite the
Ten Commandments?¹

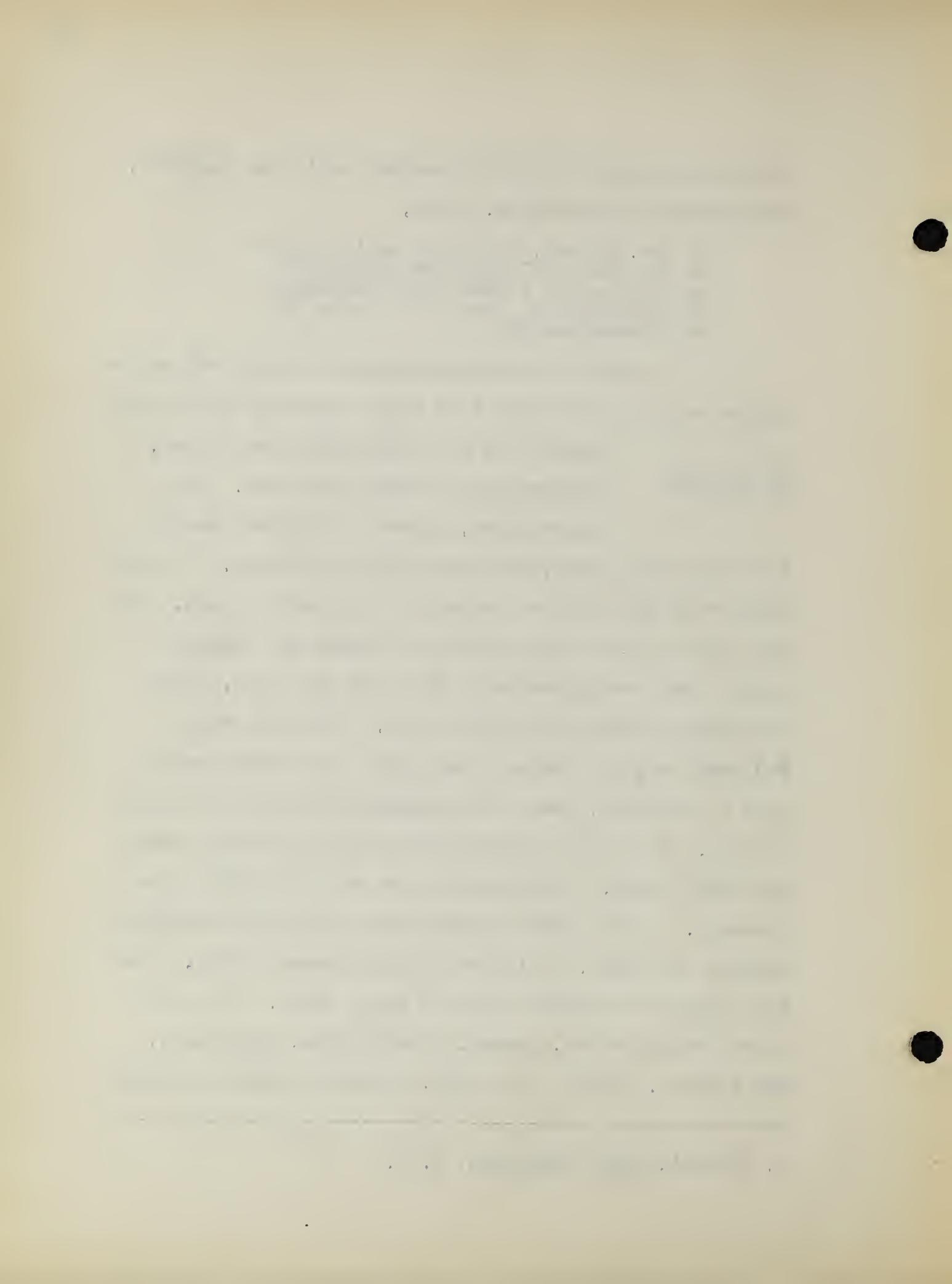
Being of a prominent Amherst family she shared
in the social life of the town which consisted of "college

SOCIAL LIFE
IN AMHERST

levees," as the receptions were called,
lectures and literary occasions. The

Senior Levee, given by the President to
the graduating class, was the event of the year. To this
Emily went with all the friends of the senior class, and
was perhaps one of the strolling couples who wandered
up and down the sidewalks in front of the house. The
diversions were calm in those days. There was the
Wednesday evening prayer meeting and the Sewing Society
once a fortnight, when the clergyman and husbands came in
for tea. The annual cattle show given in October was an
important event. Commencement week was not without its
pleasure. On Wednesday evening Edward Dickinson had~~had~~ his
Trustee Tea Party. This was a time honored affair. Tea
and supper were served from six until eight. Here were
assembled governors, judges, missionaries, professors,
and editors. Later on in life, on these occasions, Emily

1. Bianchi, Emily Dickinson, P.34.



Dickinson forsook her usual seclusion and poured tea amid the excitement and applause of those near her, a fine compliment to her charming wit.

The years following her South Hadley experiences were externally uneventful. In 1853, however,

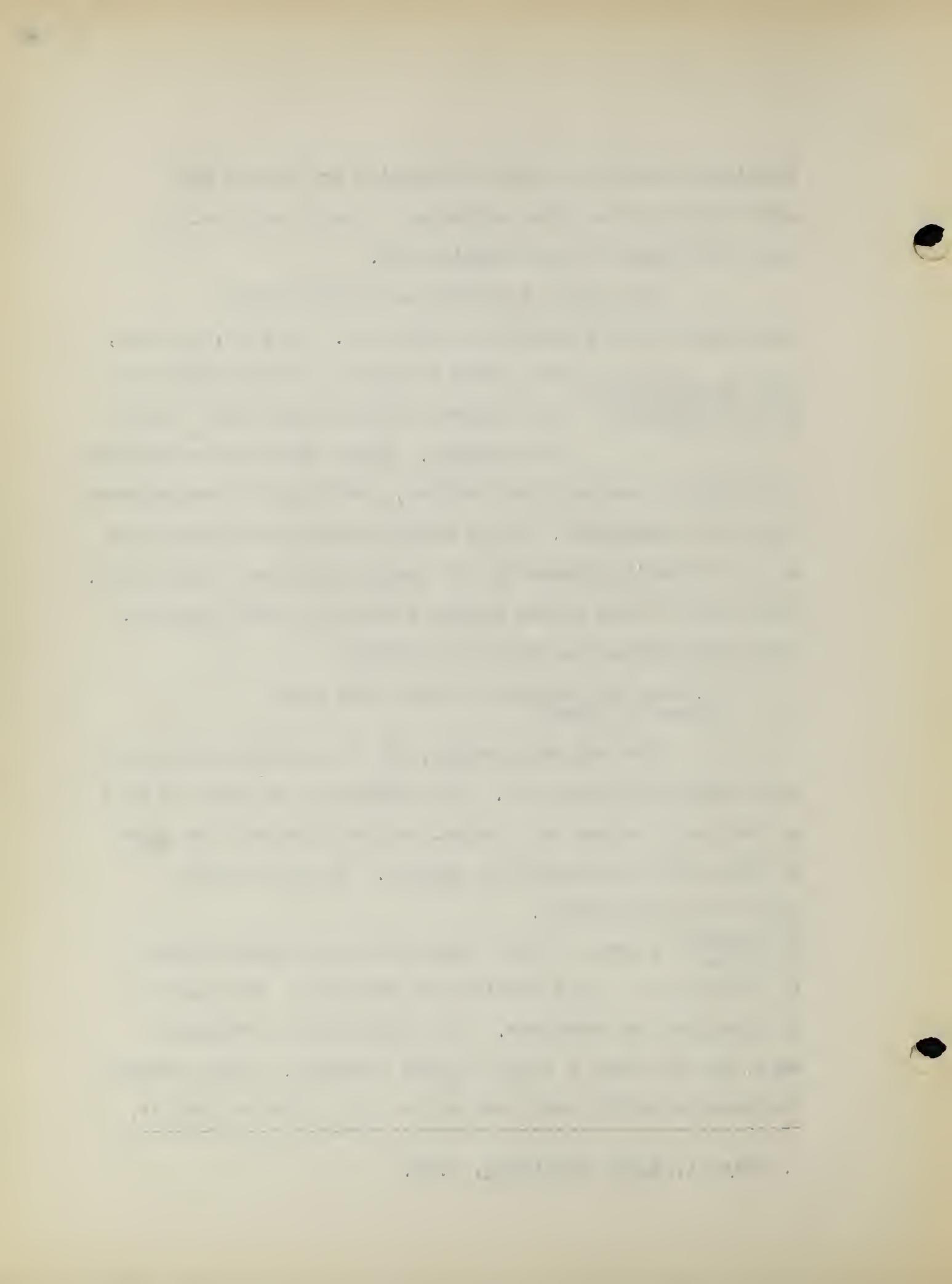
TRIP TO WASHINGTON
AND PHILADELPHIA she spent a winter in Washington with her father, who had been newly elected to Congress. There Emily was recognized as unique by men much her seniors, and tales of her repartee are still remembered. It is said that she astonished some of her father's friends by her insight into men and affairs. One story is told of her asking a prim old Chief Justice, when plum pudding on fire was offered:

O, Sir, May one eat of hell fire with impunity here?¹

She met many people, but the jostle and turmoil and scramble confused her. She walked up and down the hall in the hotel as was her custom, but was excused from some of the gaiety on account of fatigue. Yet she was far gayer than ever before.

HER DISASTROUS
LOVE AFFAIR It was at this time that Emily faced tragedy in the form of a love affair that was not to materialize in happiness and marriage. Up to this time, Untermeyer says, she had been a light hearted coquette. Emily herself declares she might have been Eve or the belle of Amherst.

1. Bianchi, Emily Dickinson, P.46.



While in Philadelphia she attended church, heard the young, handsome preacher, and "took the immortal wound." It was love at first sight, and their love for each other was quickly acknowledged, confirmed and established. The man Emily cared for was married and had children. There must have been moments of desperate determination and Mrs. Bianchi says that the two predestined souls were kept apart only by Emily's high sense of duty. Her background and inheritance were too much for her. She fled back to Amherst and her suitor followed her, begging her to run away with him. Lavinia rushed breathless across the lawn to Sister Sue, urging:

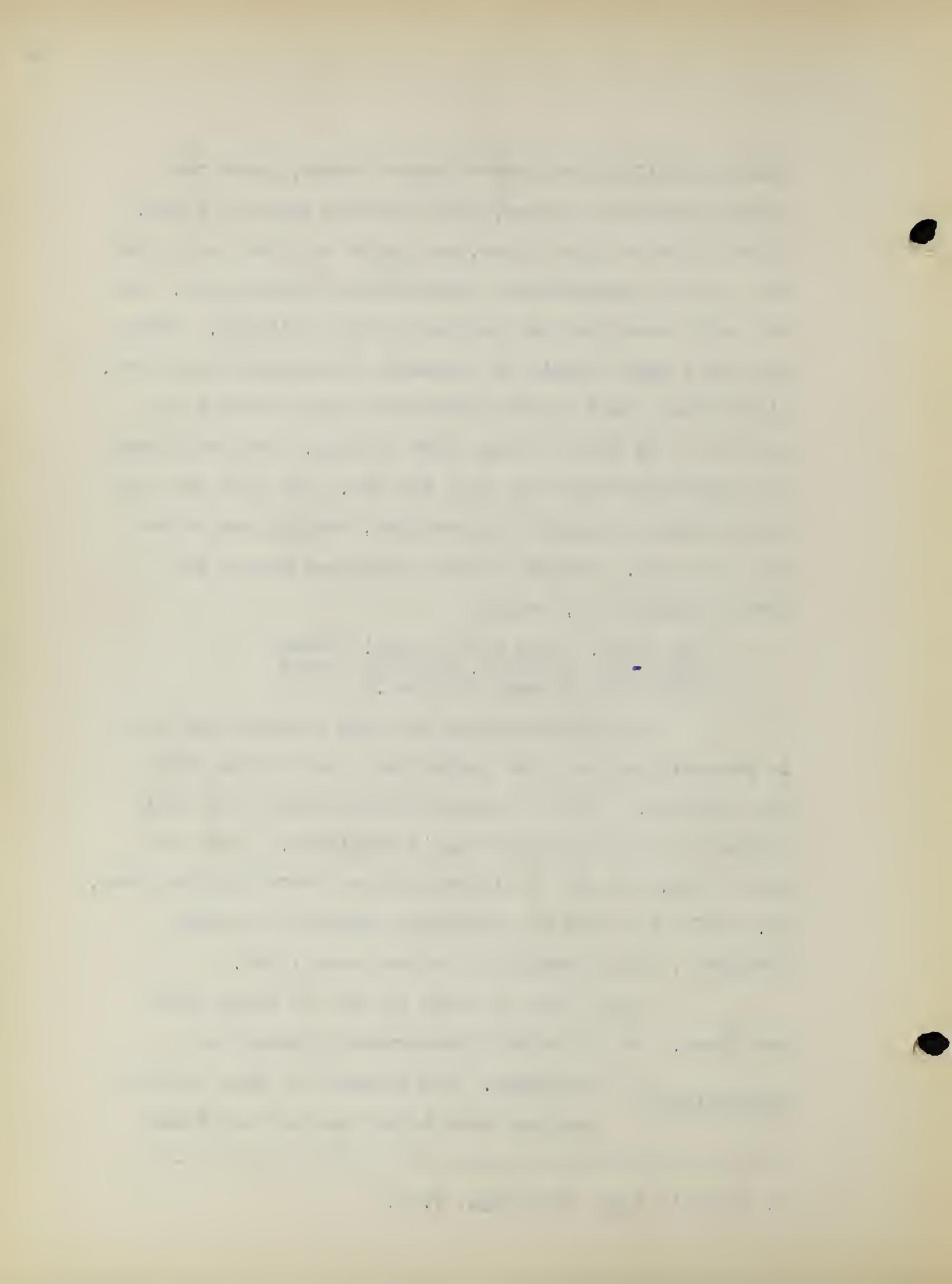
Sue, come! That man is here! Father and mother are away, and I am afraid Emily will go away with him.¹

No one knows what was said during those hours at Amherst, but both her sisters say that it was Emily who resisted. With her characteristic sensitivity she refused to wreck another woman's happiness. After a short time, the man she loved left his profession and home, and taking his wife and children withdrew to another continent, dying prematurely a few years later.

Emily went on alone in the old house under the pines. To all outward appearances nothing had

happened. She resumed her home duties,
RENUNCIATION and her love affair was not mentioned

1. Bianchi, Emily Dickinson, P.47.



in the family circle. In her room hung a picture in a heavy oval frame of gold - unexplained. Later she asked a friend to name her baby Robert, and seemed to get comfort out of calling him by it, saying that it was the "bravest name alive."*

Emily withdrew more and more from the world, never going beyond the boundary of her father's estate

SECLUSION except to visit her friend Sue who lived next door. John Gould Fletcher says:

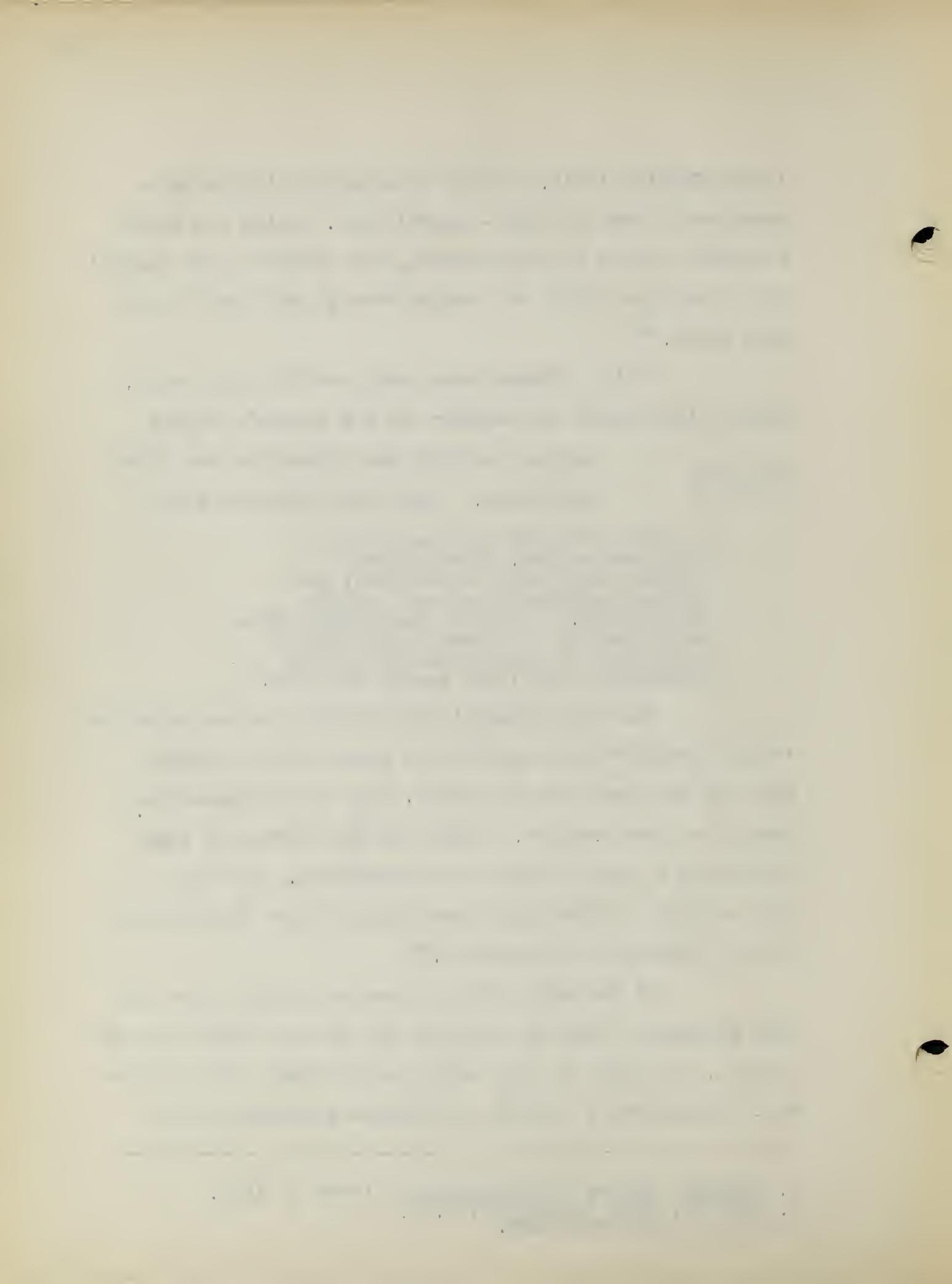
It was this event that made Emily Dickinson a poet. That is but another proof that to the poet, the genius, nothing is trivial, all is significant. She faced her renunciation in the spirit of a martyr, and out of this agony of spirit, maintained for thirty-two years, her poetry was born.¹

She took refuge in her flowers, in her relation to her brother's wife, and in her poems. It is probable that had she gone with her lover, many of her poems would never have been written. Emily had the courage to face heartbreak - even to hold on to heartbreak. Hers was that exquisite pride which dared declare that "alleviation of the irreparable degrades it."²

It is hardly fair to assume that her more and more cloistered life was entirely due to her disappointment in love. As given by the family to Mrs. Todd, Emily's life as a recluse was a natural, inevitable expression of a

1. Saturday Review of Literature, October 6, 1928.

2. Bianchi, Emily Dickinson, P.48.
* Last name not mentioned.



nature so sensitive that even the unavoidable intrusions of social life were unbearable.

She was as truly a nun as any avowed celibate, but the altar she served was veiled from every eye save that of God.¹

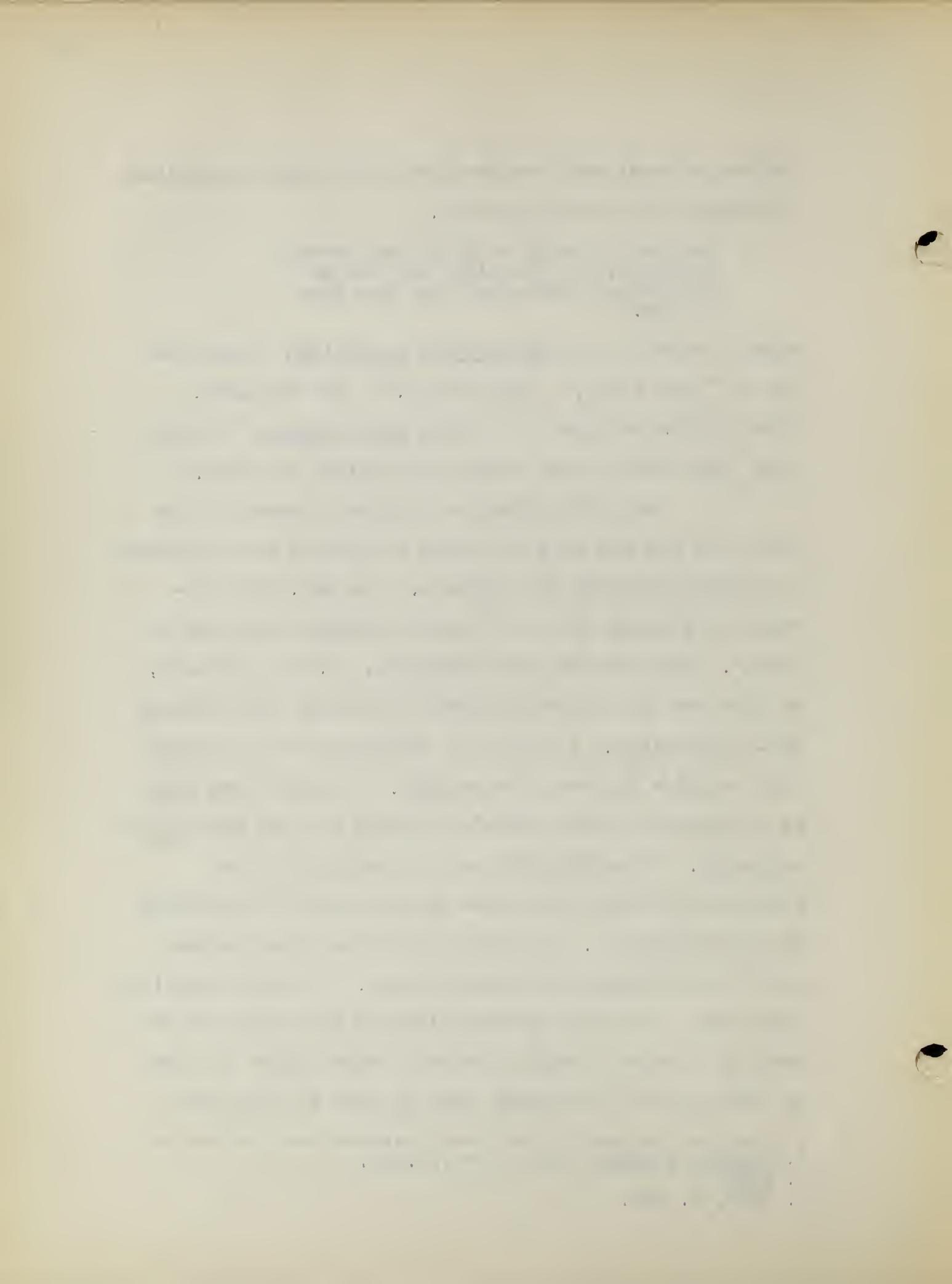
Samuel Bowles of the Springfield Republican describes her as "part angel,".. ."part demon."² She was also, Ethel Parton declares in the New York Outlook, "a good part fairy with a warm underlying residue of woman."³

Emily Dickinson was not indifferent to the world but she was able to resign it because she possessed a superior capacity for pleasure. The sun, the ever-changing seasons, gave her delights others never saw so keenly. She withdrew into seclusion, it has been said, so that she might live her ardent spiritual life without petty intrusions. Her love of solitude must have dated from the time she was a young girl. It might have begun as a reaction to her father's dominant note of Puritanical authority. Respectability was the keynote in the Dickinson home and the entire family dwelt in the shadow of his personality. In Emily's youth we have glimpsed more than ordinary self-determination. Is it not possible that these two strong personalities so different and yet seeming to care so deeply for each other forced the one to seek her own development more or less in seclusion?

1. Current Opinion, June, 1924, P.780.

2. Ibid,

3. Ibid, P. 780.



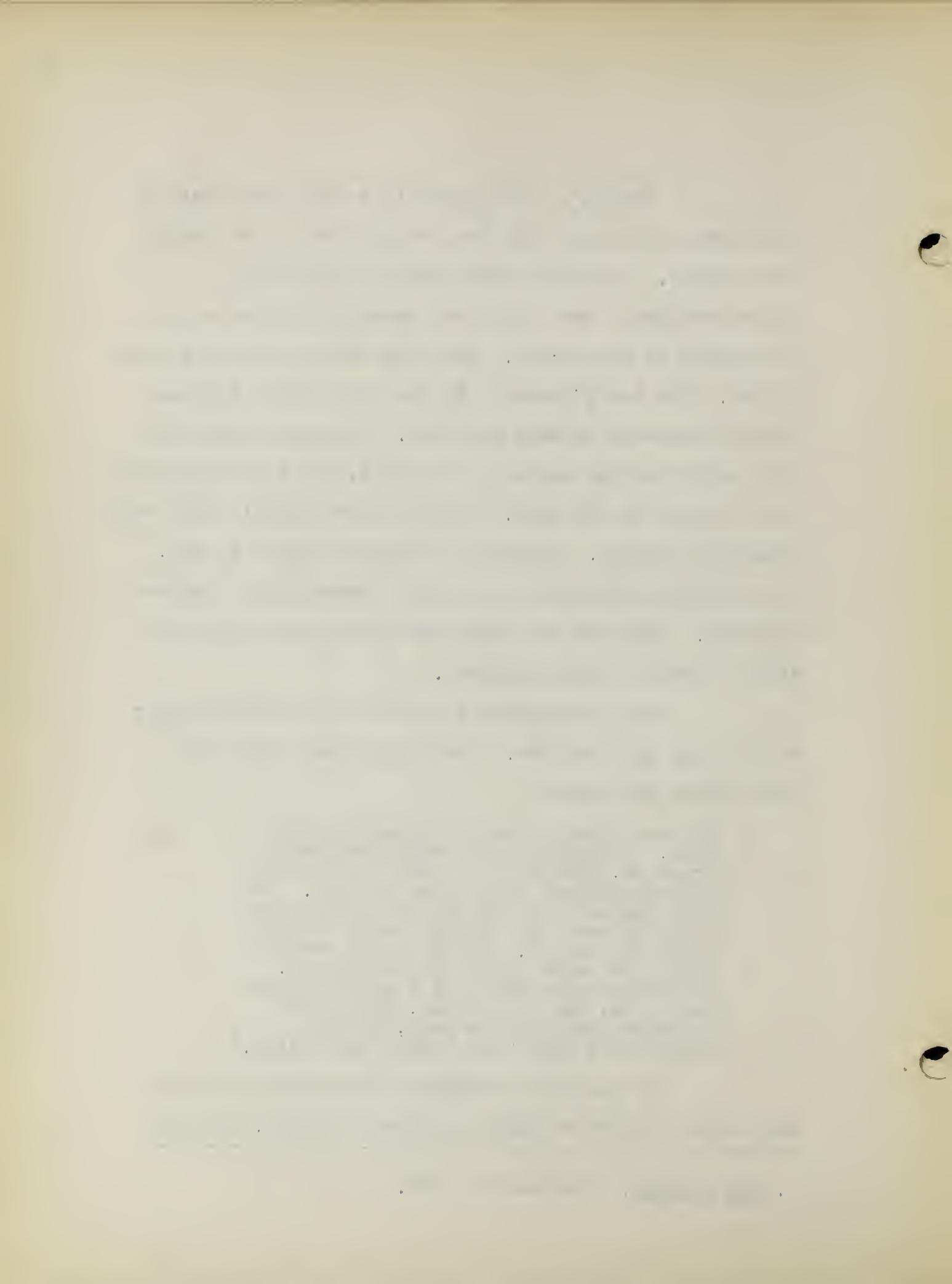
However, there seems to be no doubt that her withdrawal from the world was accentuated by her tragic love affair. That her retreat was to the bright observatories of the spirit may account for the lack of morbidness in her poetry. Solitude made her and was part of her. She has glimpsed into the world which few can see and returned to tell us about. Those who knew her best said that she was not an invalid, but was fascinating and charming to the last. She had tried society and found something lacking. There were glorious things to see, but everyone seemed to be in such a hurry and no one was thinking. That she was happy and interested in life is seen in the following incident.

She had invited a singer in the church choir to come and sing for her. The young woman came with her brother and sister:

In the library, dimly lighted from the hall, a tiny figure in white darted to greet us, grasped our hands and told us of her pleasure in hearing us sing. She said she had not met the brother but had distinguished his whistle as he trudged along the street. As she stood before us in the vague light of the library, we were chiefly aware of a pair of great dark eyes, set in a small, delicately chiseled face, little body, quaint, simple as a child and wholly unaffected.¹

A thoughtful neighbor once asked Lavinia if she could not induce Emily to go out a little. "But why

1. The Bookman, November 24, 1929.



should I?" Lavinia answered, "She is quite happy and contented as she is. I would only disturb her."

The family conversation that floated to her room, the people she saw going about their work, the

JOYS Springfield Republican, all brought her

glimpses of the outside world. She enjoyed the excitement of the village fire, she found days of ecstasy in a glimpse of a circus parade. She watched the miracle of the aurora borealis, the coming of every day and night, and the splendor of the changing seasons.

Her brother's marriage brought a thrilling new element into her life. She continued to flit across the lawns to the other house long after other visits had ceased and often her light flashed a friendly greeting when she did not go herself.

Some of her happiest hours were spent with the children. They adored her and it was a treat to be left in her care. She treated them as equals and trusted them with her choicest interests. To them her solitude never seemed strange, for they seemed to understand. She wrote them clever notes and sent them little gifts. Emily was just a child like them, only she had power to produce unexpected regards and avert disastrous consequences.

Says Mrs. Bianchi:

To her niece and nephews she was of fairy lineage, akin to the frost on the

nursery pane in winter or the humming bird in mid-summer; the realization of our vivid fancy, the confederate in every contraband desire, the very spirit of the 'Never, never land.' Once, when my brother Ned as a child, looking up at the evening star said wistfully, 'I want to go up there, Aunt Emily.' 'All right,' she cried, 'Get your horse and buggy and we'll go tonight.'¹

And again:

Once let us get to her and we were transported, obstinate, oblivious. To water her plants with her tiny watering-pot; to help her to ice a loaf of plumcake for her father's birthday, to watch her check off the rich dark caramels she unfailingly kept in hand for us, to share her wickedness in skirmishing to avoid outsiders...what other joys could drag us from these?

Her life never lacked its joy in comedy nor was her spirit quenched by the tragedy of her life. She played such games a battledore and shuttlecock in the long winter evenings. Emily convulsed the onlookers by her antics and improvised brilliantly on the piano all sorts of dramatic performances.

Her nature was so shrinking that contact with people, outside her family, was intolerable to her. The sight of a line of her own in print would upset her. Sister Sue once sent a poem of hers to the Springfield Republican without her knowledge, and it almost caused a breach in their friendship. Although she knew she could write poetry, she never made it public except when a rare bit was sent with some flowers

1. Bianchi, The Single Hound, Preface, P.vii.
2. Ibid, P. ix.

from her greenhouse or garden to a sick friend or when she was moved by some bereavement.

As the years went on she drew more and more into herself. Her intimate friends saw her less and less and her letters were less frequent. Her heart was torn

LATER DAYS by the sudden death of her father and that of her favorite nephew, and her strength

was weakened by the long invalidism of her mother. After her father's death she went about wondering where he could be. Her mind did not seem to grasp the loss. Only God, eternity, and the thought of immortality seemed worthwhile.

She went about her simple duties and often stood looking out the kitchen window as if she had "heard voices."

While her work fascinated her, there came a morning in June when she was smitten as her father before her. Though she lived for two years it was impossible for her to write more than a pencilled note. At the age of fifty-six, Emily Dickinson, who has been called the most captivating figure in American letters, returned to immortality as a winged thing - set free.

In accordance with the principles of personalism as explained in the first chapter it is now our purpose to discover what facts we can glean from her life that allow us to believe that she was a personalistic idealist.

Personalism values the worth of the individual self and holds that each one has a right to an inner life.

PERSONALISTIC PHILOSOPHY AS REVEALED IN HER LIFE

That a person is a social being and only lives in relation to others is another belief of

personalism. Does Emily Dickinson agree with these ideas as revealed in her life?

Mrs. Bianchi says of her:

Each personality had a dignity that lent awe to her. She was respectful to every mortal as to every worm that crawls. She could mock or eprogramize the mean or outrageous, but never inflict a false or wounding touch or thought upon a sincere or unspoiled nature. Toward her family and her daily circle, friends, chance comers she was the spirit of loveliness, incarnate... The fruit of her religion was incarnate devotion, service, wanting nothing for herself except to give to some one else.¹

Although she developed her own inner life to an unusual degree, she respected the individuality of others. When her father stalked out HER VIEW OF MAN of the room with the remark, "Emily how could you!" she respected him and left unsaid what she felt but tried to live her own life as much as possible. This is portrayed in the incident when her father crossed the lawn one winter's night when the group were having a hilariously good time playing games to inquire the meaning of the late hour. Emily

1. Bianchi, Emily Dickinson, P.96.

drooped and disappeared before him like dew, without a sound, but with a wicked glance or gesture to assert her unreconcilement to the proceedings.¹

It is clearly seen here that she valued the personality of the individual - in this case that of her father and herself. Emily, although seemingly shut off from people, gained in insight by contacts with her family, her friends, and books. Her relationship, especially to the children, is proof of the fact that she contributed something to their lives and in so doing she also gained. This is also shown in the many little deeds she did for the family and friends to make them happy. The fact that she depended also on others for her fullest life is seen in the great loss she could not reconcile herself to at the time of her father's and again her nephew's death. "For a time it seemed as though her mind could not sustain the blow." If she had been easily interested only in her self and her work the loss would not have been so deep. This shows the personalistic concept that a person is a social being and lives in relation to others.

No doubt the best example of her value of another's personality is in her refusal to spoil another woman's happiness even though she was denied the full realization of true love. This sense of duty was gained

1. Bianchi, Emily Dickinson, P.64.

from a fine sense of idealism which she could not but maintain. From the time she stood up and refused to keep Christmas as a fast day, she sought for larger freedom, to escape the inconsequential and take time for the real things of life. She demanded the right of happiness where and how she found it, regardless of what others thought.

She loved only things that really mattered, the world that she looked out upon and the God to whom she reached.¹

Personalism believes that nature is a manifestation of God. He is an immanent spirit behind the universe and beyond it. Emily VIEW OF THE WORLD Dickinson was more than just an ordinary lover of nature. To her nature spoke a veritable language. When she ran away from little things it was nature that comforted her heart and senses. Her desk where she wrote her poems was close to the conservatory door. Many a night she stayed up to see that her plants did not freeze. She loved to listen to the winds, the rain, and the birds. It was a joy to see the cherries ripen and the maple leaves turn to flame on the mountain side.

Her conservatory has been described as a fairy land and she tolerated none of the usual house plants. She even "comforted her plants" and scattered affection upon trees, clouds, bats and spiders.

1. Catholic World, December, 1924.

She lived in an exciting world of orioles, and daffodils and cocoons and butterflies and robins and snakes and daisies and clouds and snow and hemlocks and dews and walls and mountains and revolving planets. She became more and more philosopher and made shrewd observations.¹

Miss Dickinson, however, did not just see God in his manifestations, who was exhausted by them. She saw beyond the mere flowers and trees the Spirit who created them, for Mrs. Bianchi, who knew her, says:

She was not a pantheist, though she saw each tree and bush aflame with God, and every revelation of twilight and dawn or starry sky as spread forth by the Eternal.²

The world Emily Dickinson believed in had an Intelligence behind it even though she could not fully understand it. That one of her mystic, sensitive temperament could look up at the sky at night and not feel the presence of One who was a Comforter, Inspirer, and Guide, is impossible.

To the personalist, God is a friend, a spirit with whom we can commune in spirit, and not a despot who lays down distinct rules that must be obeyed. It was impossible for Emily to accept the Puritan idea of God. She was frankly irreverent to the old-fashioned, conventional religious atmosphere of the family, to which she always remained alien.

1. Saturday Review of Literature, October 6, 1928.
 2. Bianchi, Emily Dickinson, P.96.

She could never see why God should seem to people like bears; at terror, gloom, and rigidity she rebelled.¹

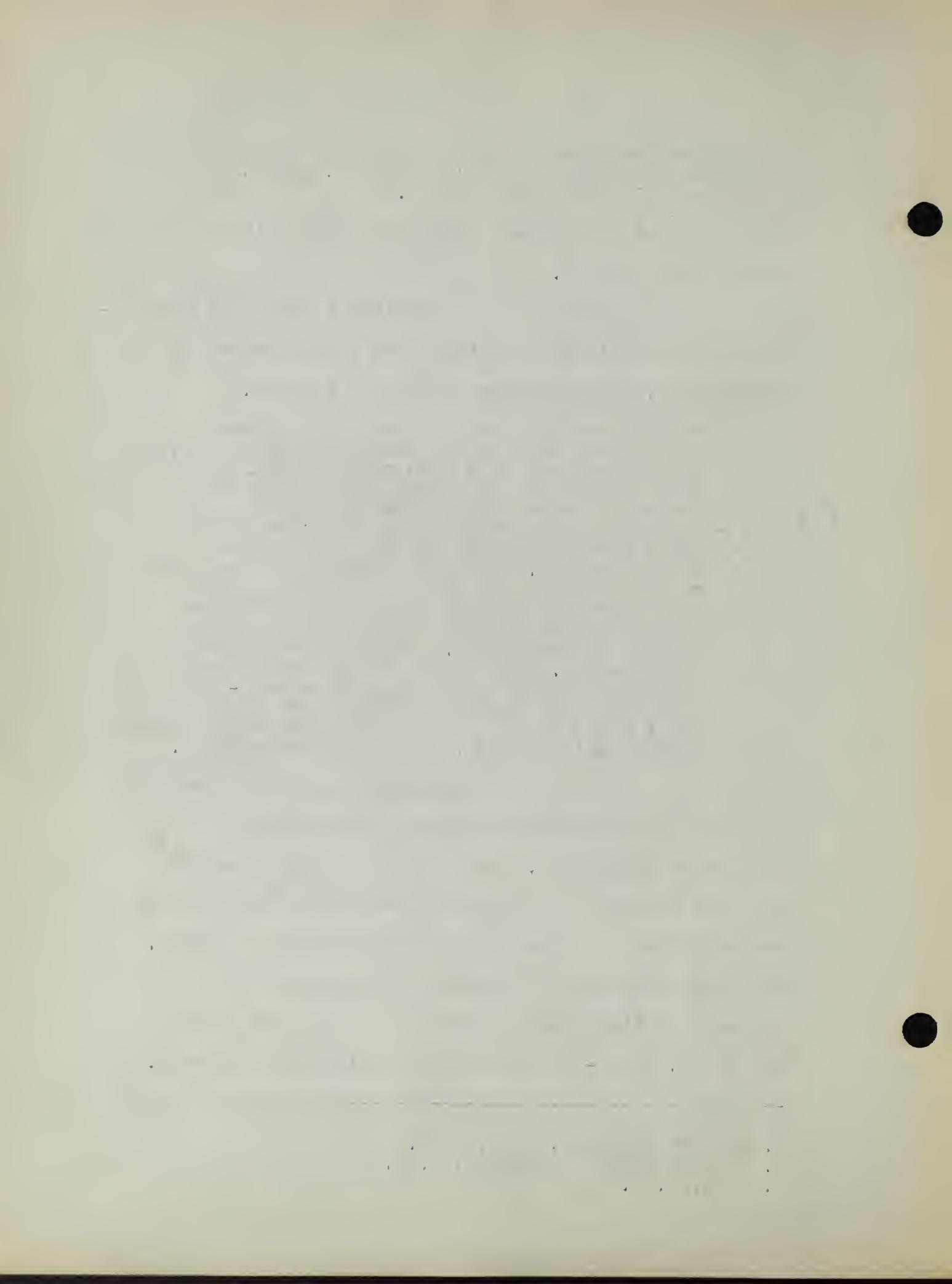
Nature seemed a more beautiful evidence of Divine Will than creeds and churches.

She did not like the idea of God as a despot - that one must minutely abstain from all labor on the seventh day, as her mother evidently believed.²

She may not have had a consciously phrased conviction, such as her family called 'Creed,' and she may not have been connected with the old First Church, with what she called her 'Father's house,' she certainly never considered God her judge or enemy; but her faith was that of one who has never ceased to be a mortal. She was a part of God and God was in her so truly that no external effort was necessary, nor was it to her possible to exaggerate the harmony between the Creator and his created child. The adjustment was never broken. She would have spoken to God more simply than to her honored parent - with less constraint; she would have been quite capable of offering God her sweetest flower or her frailest fern, sure of his acceptance.³

We cannot help agreeing that Emily's own faith was nearer the Light than the Puritanical conception of her day. God to her was not a far off God, but a spirit, a Being who was friendly and to whom she spoke, and with whom she enjoyed intimate contact. She really worshiped "in spirit and in truth" in those hours of solitude when she was alone with God, and in her quiet, every-day activities of ministry to others.

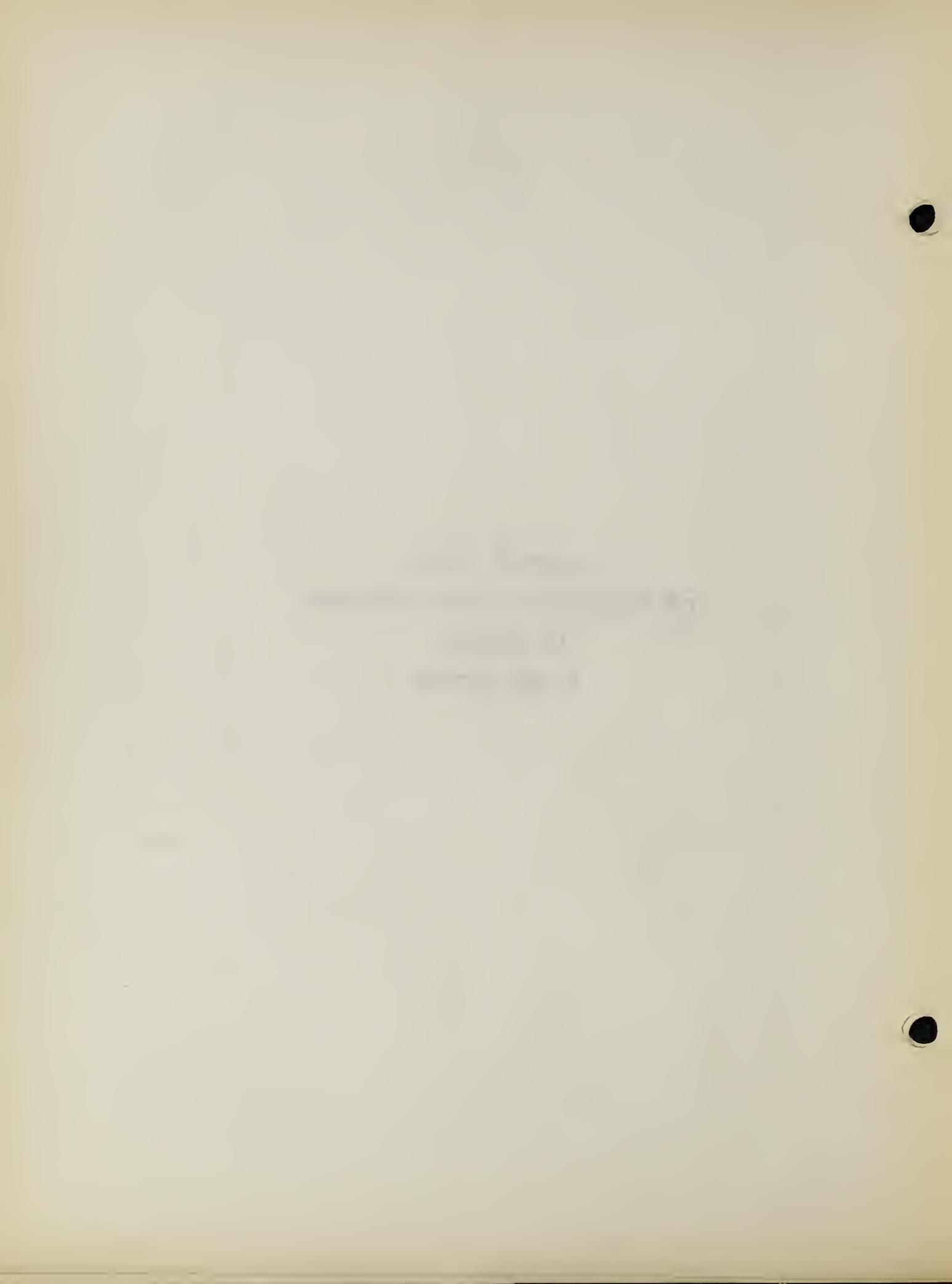
1. Current Opinions, June, 1924.
 2. Bianchi, Emily Dickinson, P.93.
 3. Ibid, P.97.



In reviewing the facts of Miss Dickinson's life as they indicate the philosophy, we can discover personalistic tendencies in her respect CONCLUSION for personality and in her interdependence on others for her fullest life. Mrs. Bianchi seems to indicate that her idea of the world and God was personalistic, but we shall find more definite proof of this later.

the following year, and the author's name is
not mentioned. The author's name is not mentioned
in the preface of the first edition, and the author's
name is not mentioned in the preface of the second
edition. The author's name is not mentioned in the
preface of the third edition, and the author's name is
not mentioned in the preface of the fourth edition.

CHAPTER THREE
THE PHILOSOPHY OF EMILY DICKINSON
AS REVEALED
IN HER LETTERS



In the preceding chapter an attempt was made to show how the philosophy of Emily Dickinson was revealed in her life. It is our purpose to reinforce these statements by quoting sections of her letters that seem to give us a glimpse of her philosophy.

As Miss Dickinson kept no journal, her letters are all the more interesting because they contain all the

INTRODUCTION prose she is known to have written. It is interesting to note that in her later

years she shrank so from publicity that her handwriting would undergo that she rarely addressed the envelopes.

Emily kept her little reserves, and bared her soul but seldom, yet she wrote a large number of letters to each of her correspondents. Many letters are missing that would be of rare interest - most notably those to the Lord family, and Helen Hunt, her most intimate friends.

These, however, were supposed to have been burned in accordance with a mutual understanding. Among her correspondents were Dr. Josiah G. Holland, one of the founders and editors of Scribner's Magazine, and Colonel Thomas Higginson. The latter's article in the Atlantic Monthly on the "Procession of the Flowers" attracted her attention so that a stray note of admiration began a correspondence centering around her literary activities, in which she addressed him as "Dear Master."

She wrote to her girlhood friends, her cousins Louisa and Fannie Norcross, Maria Whitney and others at times of births, marriages, and deaths. On such occasions Emily always sent a flashing bit of verse or a note of comfort or congratulation. The letters mentioned are quoted from The Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson, by her niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi, and reveal a charm and philosophy that even those who did no know her were able to appreciate and enjoy.

When Emily was fourteen she wrote these lines, describing a school friend:

I can't help thinking every time I see this singular piece of humanity of Shakespeare's description of a tempest in a teapot. But I must not laugh about her, for I verily believe she has a good heart, and that is the principal thing now-a-days.¹

She seemed to realize that it was the inner self that really counted; that one must know people in their various aspects before liking them. This may also be found in a reference to her teachers:

I went to see Miss F. in her room yesterday....I love her very much, and think I shall love all the teachers when I become better acquainted with them, and find out their ways, which, I can assure you, are almost 'past finding out.'²

We have seen previously that Emily held the

1. P.112-113.
2. P.122.

personalistic belief that a person is a social being, is unique and is influenced and helped by others. We

IDEA OF PERSONS

shall now attempt to see how this is further revealed in her letters. That a person is a social being and is influenced by others is revealed in her dread of being examined at school:

I cannot avoid a few misgivings when I think of those tall, stern trustees, and when I know that I shall lose my character if I don't recite as precisely as the laws of the Medes and Persians.¹

Emily realized that friends are interested in our joys and wanted to share her happiness with others:

You will probably think me foolish thus to give you an inventory of my time while at home, but I did so much in those four short days that I wanted you to know and enjoy it too.²

When her friends cannot come, she is deeply disappointed also:

I think I hemmed them faster for knowing you weren't coming, my fingers had nothing else to do...Odd, that I, who say 'No,' so much, cannot bear it from others.³

That it is our friends who help to make us what we are is a personalistic concept. In one of her brief notes to Sue she writes,

With the exception of Shakespeare you have taught me more knowledge than any one living. To say that sincerely is strange praise.⁴

Had it not been for this note, written in her early

1. P.114.
2. P.128.

3. P.225,
4. P.64.

twenties showing her appreciation of her friend, Emily Dickinson's poems might never have been published.

I like your praise because I know
it knows. If I could make you and
Austin proud of me some day, a long
way off, 'twould give me taller feet.¹

Miss Dickinson clearly shows in this letter the inspiring influence of other personalities in her life. That Emily's world was made up of her friends is again seen in the following:

When you have lost a friend, Master,
you remember you could not begin again
because there was no world.²

That the entire world looks ~~bad~~ when a loved one is ill, especially if it happens to be a sister, is quite vivid and most real to Emily.

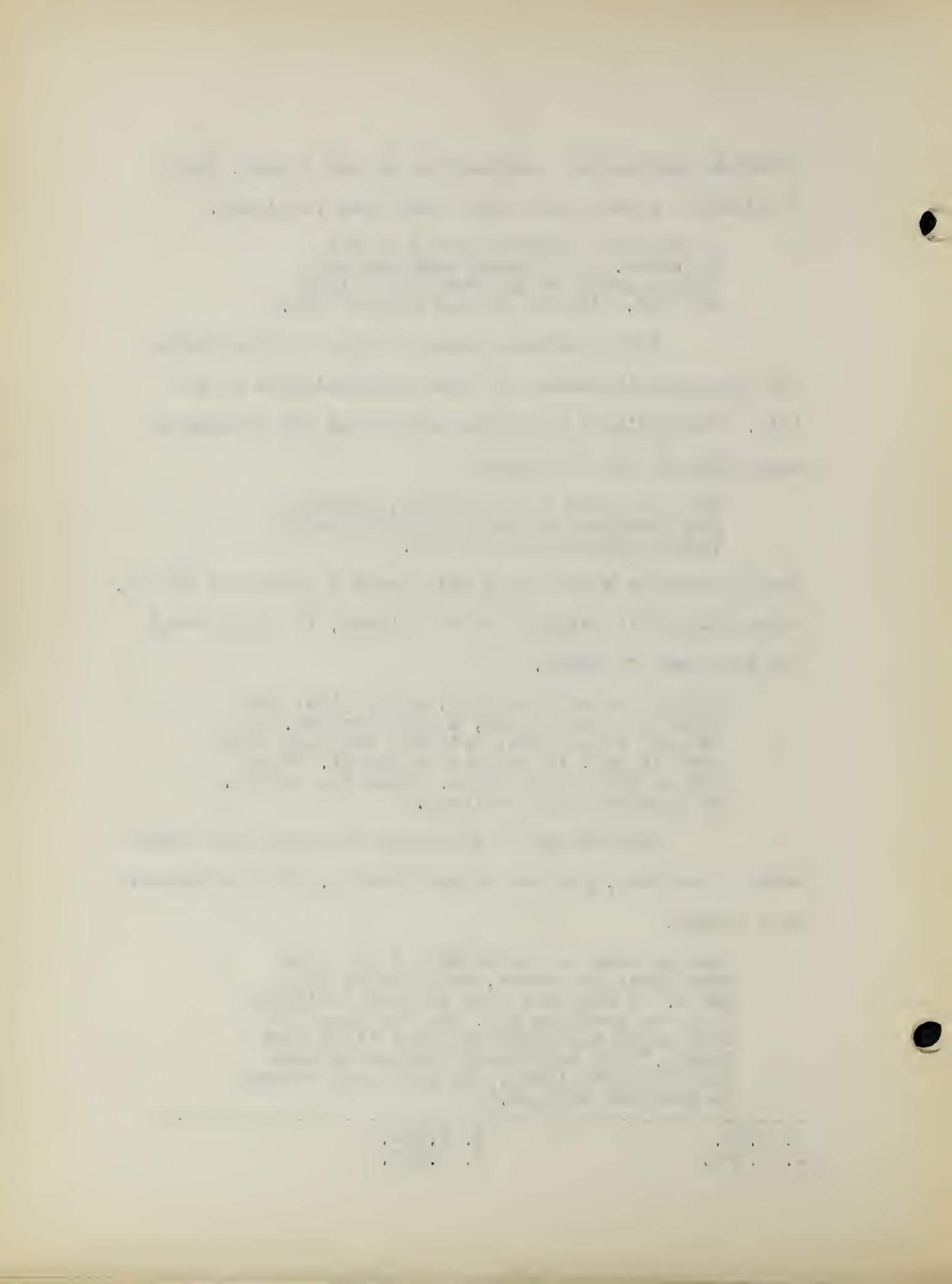
Vinnie is sick to-night, which gives the world a russet tinge, usually so red. It is only a headache, but when the head aches next to you, it becomes important. When she is well, time leaps. When she is ill, he lags or stops entirely.³

Although Emily was happy at school and things seemed like home, yet she writes from Mt. Holyoke Seminary to a friend,

Austin came to see me when I had been here about two weeks, and brought Vinya and A. I need not tell you how delighted I was to see them all, nor how happy it made me to hear them say that 'they were lonely.' It is a sweet feeling to know that you are missed, and that your memory is precious at home.⁴

1. P.65.
2. P.306.

3. P.210.
4. P.127.



That is a perfectly normal reaction. It shows that Emily realized that she had her place in the family circle and that her personality had contributed to the group.

When sorrow came Emily was a real comfort to her friends and sought to share their heartache, and so ease the pain of another. In writing to Mrs. Bowles on the death of her husband she says:

When the best is gone, I know that other things are not of consequence. The heart wants what it wants, or else it does not care.

You wonder why I write so. Because I cannot help. I like to have you know some care - so when your life gets faint for its other life, you can lean on us. We won't break, May. We look very small, but the reed can carry weight.

Not to see what we love is very terrible, and talking doesn't ease it, and nothing does but just itself. The eyes and the hair we chose are all there are - to us. Isn't that so, Mary?

I often wonder how the love of Christ is done when that below holds so.

I hope the little 'Robert' coos away the pain. Perhaps your flowers help, some..¹

That she had suffered herself and so was able to sympathize with others is revealed in the following note:

The only balmless wound is the departed human life ~~was~~ have learned to need.

For that, even immortality is a slow solace. All other peace had many roots and will spring again.

With cheer from one who knows.²

This same idea is seen in the statement: "...To relieve the irreparable degrades it."³ And again, "The crucified require no glove."⁴

1. P. 232.
2. P. 322.

3. P. 311.
4. Ibid.

Emily is one of those brave souls who face suffering without self-pity and through the insight gained was able to help others see the light, because of her own bitter and heart-rending experience. Her note to Mrs. Bowles proves this statement, we can well believe.

I hasten to you, Mary because no moment must be lost when a heart is breaking, for though it broke so long, each time is newer than the last if it broke truly. To be willing that I should speak to you was so generous, dear.

Sorrow almost resents love, it is so inflamed.

I am glad if the broken words helped you. I had not hoped so much, I felt so faint in uttering them, thinking of your great pain.¹

and again

I felt it sweet that you needed me - though but a simple shelter I will always last.²

She wrote to Mrs. Holland on the death of Dr. Holland:

Cling tight to the hearts that will not let you fall.....

I know you will live for our sake, dear, you would not be willing for your own. That is the duty which saves. While we are trying for others, power of life comes back, very faint at first, like the new bird, but by and by it has wings.³

Her statement, "The broken heart is broadest," again shows the value of suffering in gaining sympathy and understanding.

That it is contact with other individuals that makes for strong character and helps one to live at

1. P., 314.

2. P. 316.

3. P. 337.

4. P. 339.

his best is reiterated in the following: "The hearts that never lean must fall."¹ Emily realized this in her own life when she said:

The hope that I shall continue in love towards you, and viceversa, will sustain me till then.²

This same thought is seen in the passage:

Remember and care for me sometimes, and scatter a fragrant flower in this wilderness life of mins by writing me, and by not forgetting, and by lingering longer in prayer, that the Father may bless one more.³

The idea that people have the ability to help each other through intercessory prayer, as well as through personal contacts she evidently believes, as seen in the above letter.⁴ God is here realized as the highest person, uniting all others.

That the individual self is unique and that personality is basic is seen again in this passage:

...how we all loved Jennie Lind, but not accustomed oft to her manner of singing didn't fancy that so well as we did her. No doubt it was very fine, but take some notes from her 'Echo,' the bird songs from the 'Bird Song,' and some of her curious trills, and I'd rather have a Yankee.

Herself and not her music was what we seemed to love - she has an air of exile in her mild blue eyes, and a something sweet and touching in her native accent which charms her many friends.⁵

Also in the quotation:

Send no union letters. The soul must go by death alone, so it must by life, if it is a soul.⁶

1. P 339.

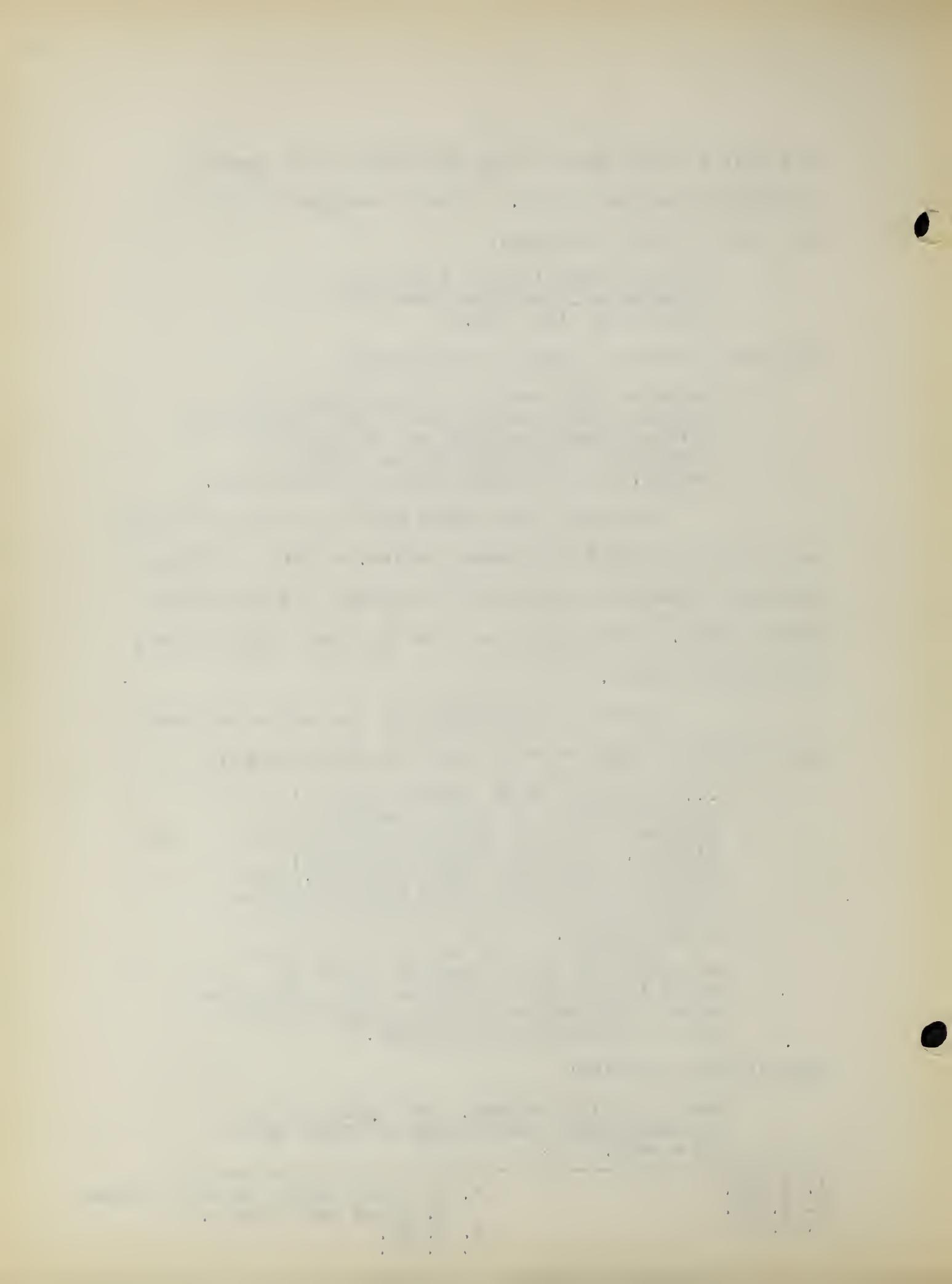
2. P.141.

3. P.145.

4. See also letter to Mrs. Bowles, P. 49 of this thesis.

5. P.156.

6. P.309.



The importance of the real self or inner life is again mentioned. "Father's real life and mine sometimes come into collision but as yet escape unhurt."¹ (That they ever did come into collision we can only surmise.) The self as essentially spirit is the idea in the following:

I am constantly more astonished that the body contains the spirit - except for over-mastering work it could not be borne.²

Emily Dickinson indeed knew that the secret of real joy was in making others happy:

At my old stand again, dear Austin, and happy as a queen to know that while I speak those whom I love are listening, and I am happier still if I shall make them happy.³

In so doing she developed her own personality, for she says: "I had rather be loved than to be called the king of earth, or a Lord in Heaven."⁴

That personality is central and basic is revealed in these lines to her brother regarding his home-coming:

Never mind faded forests, Austin, never mind silent fields - here is a little forest, whose leaf is ever green; here is a brighter garden, where not a frost has been; in its unfading flowers I hear the bright bee hum; prithee, my brother, into my garden come.⁵

A personalist finds God in all and through

1. P. 311.
2. P. 173.
5. P. 167.

3. P. 158.
4. P. 200.

all. It is more than a common love of nature, for in the flowers, for example, one sees manifested an immanent Spirit that is behind the whole universe. Nature refreshes and calms the mind because it reveals

IDEA OF THE WORLD a God who has the power to do great things. God is the cosmic force behind and beyond that which he has created.

Mrs. Bianchi ^{gives} tells us the impression that Emily did see God in nature. We shall endeavor to find facts in her letters that will substantiate this claim. Even when she was a little girl flowers always gave her a glimpse of something beyond them.

I have no flowers before me to inspire me as you had. But then you know I can imagine myself inspired by them, and perhaps that will do as well.

This continued as she grew older, and to commune with God have her peace and strength:

How glad I am that spring has come, and how it calms my mind when wearied with study to walk out in the green fields and beside the pleasant streams in which South Hadley is rich! There are not many wild flowers near, for the girls have driven them to a distance and we are obliged to walk quite a distance to find them, but they repay us by their sweet smiles and their fragrance.

The older I grow, the more do I love spring and spring flowers. Is it so with you? While at home there were several pleasure parties of which I was a member, and in our rambles we found many and beautiful children which I will mention and ~~she~~ if you have found them - the trailing arbutus,

adder's tongue, yellow violets, liverleaf, blood-root, and many other smaller flowers.¹

That Emily dearly loved her flowers and that they seemed to speak to her in a unique way is seen in the following statement:

I got down before Father this morning, and spent a few moments profitably with the South Sea rose. Father detected me, advised wiser employment, and read at devotions the chapter of the gentleman with one talent. I think he thought my conscience would adjust the gender.²

Nature was one of her teachers, and undoubtedly taught her many lessons:

You ask of my companions. Hills, sir, and the sundown, and a dog as large as myself, which my father bought me. They are better than beings because they know, but they do not tell; and the noise in the pool at noon excels my piano.³

Again the same thought appears:

Let me thank the little cousin in flowers, which, without lips, have language.⁴

And:

So valiant is the intimacy between Nature and her children, she addressed them as 'comrades in arms.'⁵

As such they give comfort to troubled souls:

Intrusiveness of flowers is brooked by even troubled hearts.

They enter and then knock - then chide their ruthless sweetness, and they remain forgiven. May these molest as fondly.⁶

1. P. P. 135.

3. P. 239.

2. P. 251.

4. P. 374.

5. P. B34.

6. P. 312.

the following

In this letter she evidently compares the awe of a star-lit night to the same feeling the Bible gives to her. If nature really "stills, incites, and infatuates, blesses, and blames" there must be a Power, Spirit, a Person that causes such a personal reaction. That Emily believes that this force behind all this wonder is God, as personalistic philosophy holds, is proven in the last line when she says, "How vast is the chastisement of beauty given by our Maker."

I thank you with wonder. Should you ask me my comprehension of a starlight night, awe were my only reply, and so of the mighty book. It stills, incites, infatuates, blesses and blames in one. Like human affection we dare not touch it, yet flee, what else remains? How vast is the chastisement of beauty given us by our Maker.

Personalism believes in a God who is active in the world today. He is a Person, a friend who is interested in the individual person
 IDEA OF GOD and with whom we can commune as spirit with spirit. In Miss Dickinson's life we endeavored to discover facts that lead us to believe in the personalistic concept of God. Whether her letters reveal this same idea of God we shall attempt to find out in this section of our chapter.

My only sketch, profile, of Heaven is a large, blue sky, bluer and larger than the biggest I have seen in June, and in it are

my friends - all of them - every one of them - those who are with me now, and those who were parted as we walked, and 'snatched up to Heaven.'

If roses had not faded, and frosts never come, and one had not fallen here and there whom I could not waken, there were no need of other heaven than the one below - and if God had been here this summer and seen the things that I have seen - I guess He would think His Paradise superfluous. Don't tell him for the world, though, for after all He's said about it, I should like to see what He was building for us, with no hammer, and no stone, and no journeyman either.¹

Nature and persons have given Miss Dickinson her idea of Heaven. A touch of humor is given us in the above, yet God is in all, and through all. The idea that God is still creating appears in the phrase, "I should like to see what he was building for us."

Emily does not consider that she is religious for she says:

They are religious, except me, and address an eclipse, every morning, which they call their Father.²

Yet she also says: "I believe the love of God may be taught not to seem like bears."³

When she was twenty she wrote the following fascinating message:

The folks have all gone away; they thought that they left me alone, and contrived things to amuse me should they stay long, and I be lonely. Lonely, indeed - they didn't look and they couldn't have seen if they had, who should bear me company. Three

here, instead of one, wouldn't it scare them? A curious trio, part earthly and part spiritual, two of us, the other all heaven and no earth. God is sitting here, looking into my very soul to see if I think right things. Yet I am not afraid for I try to be right and good; and He knows every one of my struggles. He looks very gloriously and everything bright seems dull beside Him; and I don't dare to look directly at Him for fear I shall die. Then you are here in that quiet black gown and cap - that funny little cap I used to laugh at you about - and you don't appear to be thinking about anything in particular - not in one of your breaking-dish moods, I take it. You seem aware that I am writing to you, and are amused I should think, at such friendly manifestations when you are already present.¹

She seems to think of God as near rather than afar off, yet the sense of his being a friend is lacking in this earlier selection. This idea made a deep impression on her; as is seen in the following letter:

I shall never forget the Doctor's prayer my first morning with you - so simple, so believing. That God must be a friend - that was a different God - and I almost felt warmer myself in the midst of a tie so sunshiny.²

The idea that God is love is expressed in the following way: "...and love, you know, is God, who certainly 'gave the love to reward the love,' even were there no Browning."³

In writing to Perez Cowan in 1870 she states: "Home is the definition of God."⁴ Since her homelife was a happy and a normal one is it not fair to apply the same terms to her relationship with God?

1. P.137.
3. P.326.

2. P.336-337
4. P.275

Emily was never very well and when at school speaks with gratitude of her health when she writes:

I returned home about the middle of September in very good health and spirits, for which it seems to me I cannot be sufficiently grateful to the Giver of all mercies.¹

To Mrs. Bowles, when ^{her} ~~was~~ ^{was} away from home, she writes: "I am taking lessons in prayer, so to coax God to keep you safe."² "God keep me from what they call households except that bright one of 'Faith'!"³

Most personalists believe in immortality, and it is interesting to note that Emily Dickinson does also. This is seen clearly in the following passages:

Immortality as a guest is sacred, but when it becomes as with you and with us a member of the family, the tie is more vivid...⁴

I believe we shall in some manner be cherished by our Maker - that the One who gave us this remarkable earth has the power still farther to surprise that which He has caused. Beyond that all is silence....⁴

The God Miss Dickinson seems to believe in is not a static God but one who is creating and planning for us, even though we do not understand

SUMMARY fully how it is all to be. He is a God who is "striving on to perfection" and it is a belief in this kind of a God that enables Emily Dickinson to maintain her "households of faith" until the end.

1. P. 120

3. P. 144.

2. P. 234.

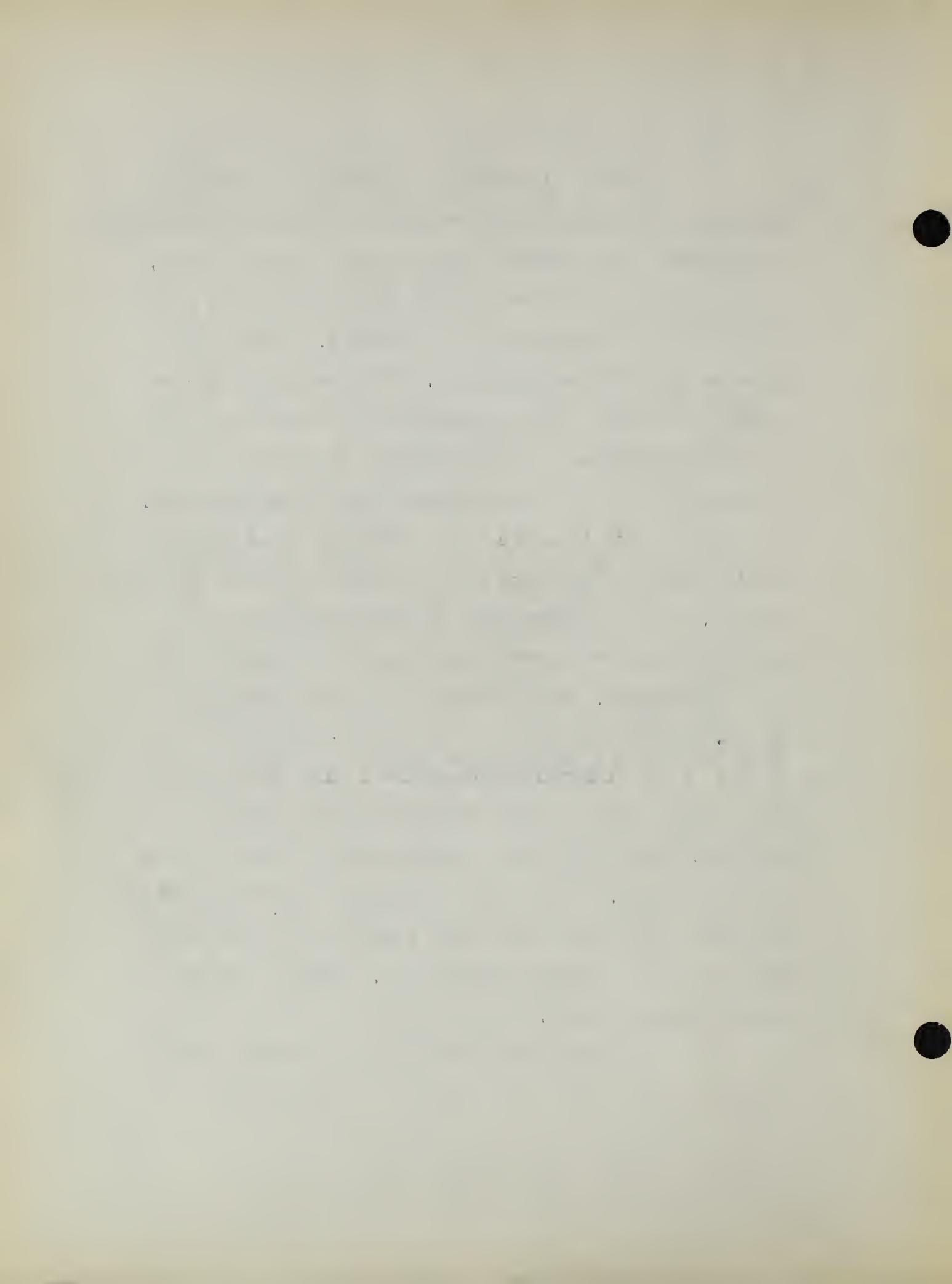
4. P. 323.

5. P. 345.

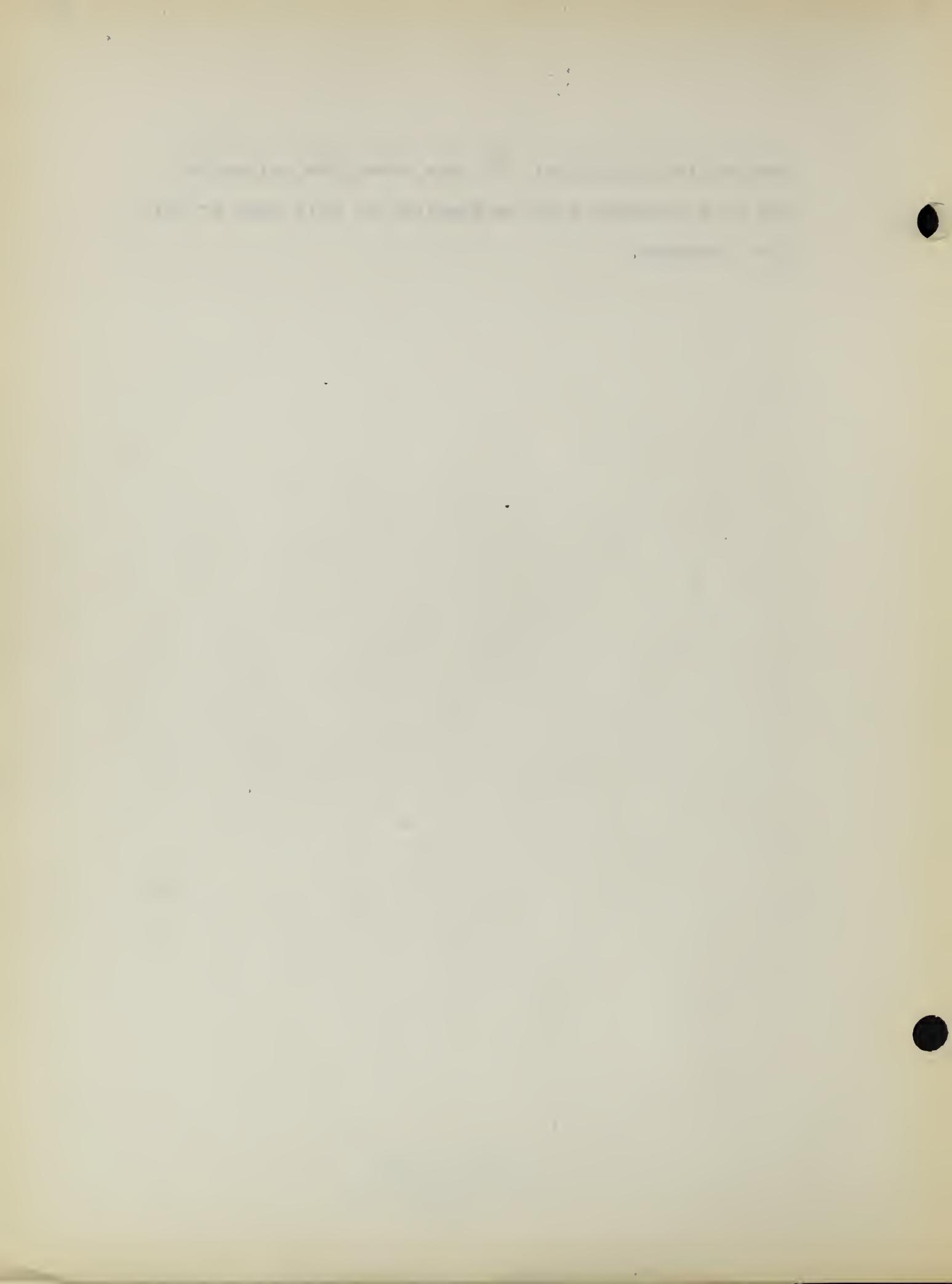
What facts have we discovered in Emily Dickinson's letters that show more clearly her personalistic tendencies? It is evident that she is a social being, as she is interested in the joys and CONCLUSION sorrows of her friends. She sends messages of cheer and sympathy. The praise of Sue she greatly cherishes, proving that while a person may be a unique individual, the reaction of personalities develops the best in her and sustains her in suffering. That personality is basic is revealed when she says of Jennie Lind, "herself and not her music was what we seemed to love." The importance of the real self or inner life is mentioned in connection with her father's lack of understanding. She also speaks of the self as a spirit.

That her love of nature is not pantheistic but personalistic as is her idea of persons is seen in the line, "How vast is the chastisement of beauty given us by our Maker." The beauty referred to is that revealed in nature - the sky - the birds - and the flowers which she so dearly loves and appreciates. God is revealed to her through nature.

Thus Miss Dickinson's letters give further support to the theory that she may be considered a



personalistic idealist, for the ideas she maintains are in accordance with personalism as laid down in our first chapter.



CHAPTER FOUR
THE PHILOSOPHY OF EMILY DICKINSON
AS REVEALED
IN HER POETRY



INTRODUCTION

In the two preceding chapters we endeavored to show that the life and letters of Emily Dickinson revealed characteristics that led us to believe that she might be considered idealistic in her philosophy. It is the purpose of this chapter to indicate how her poems further reiterate the facts we have so far discovered in order that we may later state positively that she is a personalistic idealist.

Her letters, Mrs. Bianchi says, are the record of her external life, while her poems are the journal of her mind and soul. Her poems were written strictly for herself. They were probably the notes of her thoughts, the marginalia of her private book of experience which she had no idea anyone else would ever see. The oddities of structure and finish seem to betray the fact that her poems were flashes of inspiration and not polished phrases. The poems included in "The Single Hound" were written on any chance slip of paper - sometimes the old plaid quadrille, sometimes a gilt-edged sheet with a Paris mark, or a random scrap of commercial paper from her father's law office. Each of these was folded over and merely addressed to "Sue," being sent by hand to the recipient at the earliest possible moment.

The introduction to Further Poems of Emily

Dickinson, written by her niece, and published in the spring of 1929, states:

When the little unexplored package gave up these poems of Emily Dickinson which her sister Lavinia saw fit never to publish, it was for one breathless instant as if the bright apparition of Emily had returned to the old house with the bees and the birds still busy beneath her window, to salute us with her wings.

Many of the pages are difficult to read. Some of the writing is in the shy character of her girlish habit; others are so bold there are but two words on a line and in ink not yet faded.

There are poems of each variety she made her own. They flash, they are droll, they are Nature speaking aloud, they tell the love she glorified in so direct and intimate a way that this may have been the reason they were withheld; and there are also a number of her metaphysical poems which her "Sister Sue" recognized from the first as her claim to genius.¹

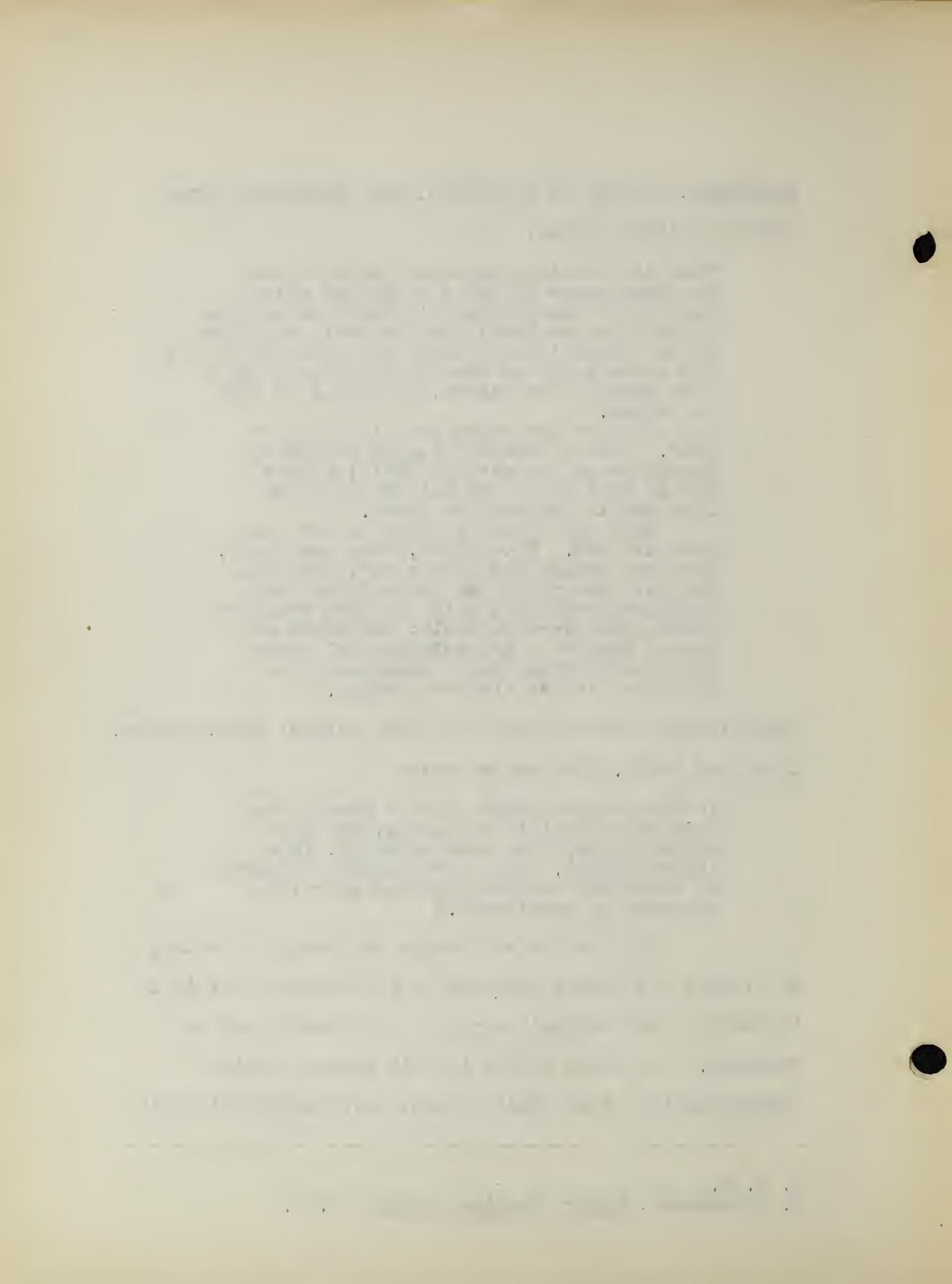
Miss Dickinson wrote chiefly of four things: love, nature, life, and death. Untermeyer says:

In the greater number of her poems, the leap of thought is so daring, the gaps so thrilling, that moments which, in a lesser spirit, would have turned to pretty or audacious conceits, became startling snatches of revelation.²

With such a wide range of poetry reflecting so vividly the direct feelings of a profound heart it is impossible that her philosophy of life should not be revealed. The poems quoted in this chapter, while representative of her entire work, have been selected with

1. P. 5.

2. Untermeyer, Modern American Poetry, P.32.



a particular purpose in view. However, the reading of these alone may enable one to agree with the reviewer in The Dial when he says:

In her poems said to have been found for the most part copied on note paper and laid away tied with ribbon, in little bundles, each of six or eight sheets, one can refresh his feeling and thinking... This brilliant understanding of the heart and its suffering, this great sensory delicacy, is rare essential wealth, proof against tarnish. It is seldom that one finds surer gold.¹

In the two previous chapters we have seen that Emily Dickinson evidently believed in the personalistic concept of the self. In her poems also we shall try to indicate that to her a person is a spirit, is causative, and is a social being. A personalist believes that the self can develop through contact with other personalities, has freedom of choice and has the right to an inner private life. It is our purpose to prove that these same personalistic ideas are also exemplified in her poetry.

Emily Dickinson realizes the essential value of the human spirit as being supreme:

IDEA OF PER-
SONS.

"Thought belongs to Him who gave it -
Then to him who hear
Its corporeal illustration. Sell
The Royal air
In the parcel. Be the merchant
Of the Heavenly Grace,
But reduce no human spirit
To disgrace of price!"²

1. The Dial, April, 1924. P.311.
2. Further Poems, P.4.

The value of the human will is revealed, when she says:

"A deed knocks first at thought,
And then it knocks at will.
That is the manufacturing spot,
And will at home and well.

It then goes out an act,
Or is entombed so still
That only to the ear of God
Its doom is audible."¹

At that one can almost hear the applause of our modern educators, with their slogan of "no impression, without expression."

Man is given the freedom of choice, Miss Dickinson believes, and must decide for himself, "the way his soul shall go."

"Experience is the angled road
Preferred against the mind
By paradox, the mind itself
Presuming it to lead
Quite opposite. How complicate
The discipline of man,
Compelling him to choose himself
His pre-appointed plan."²

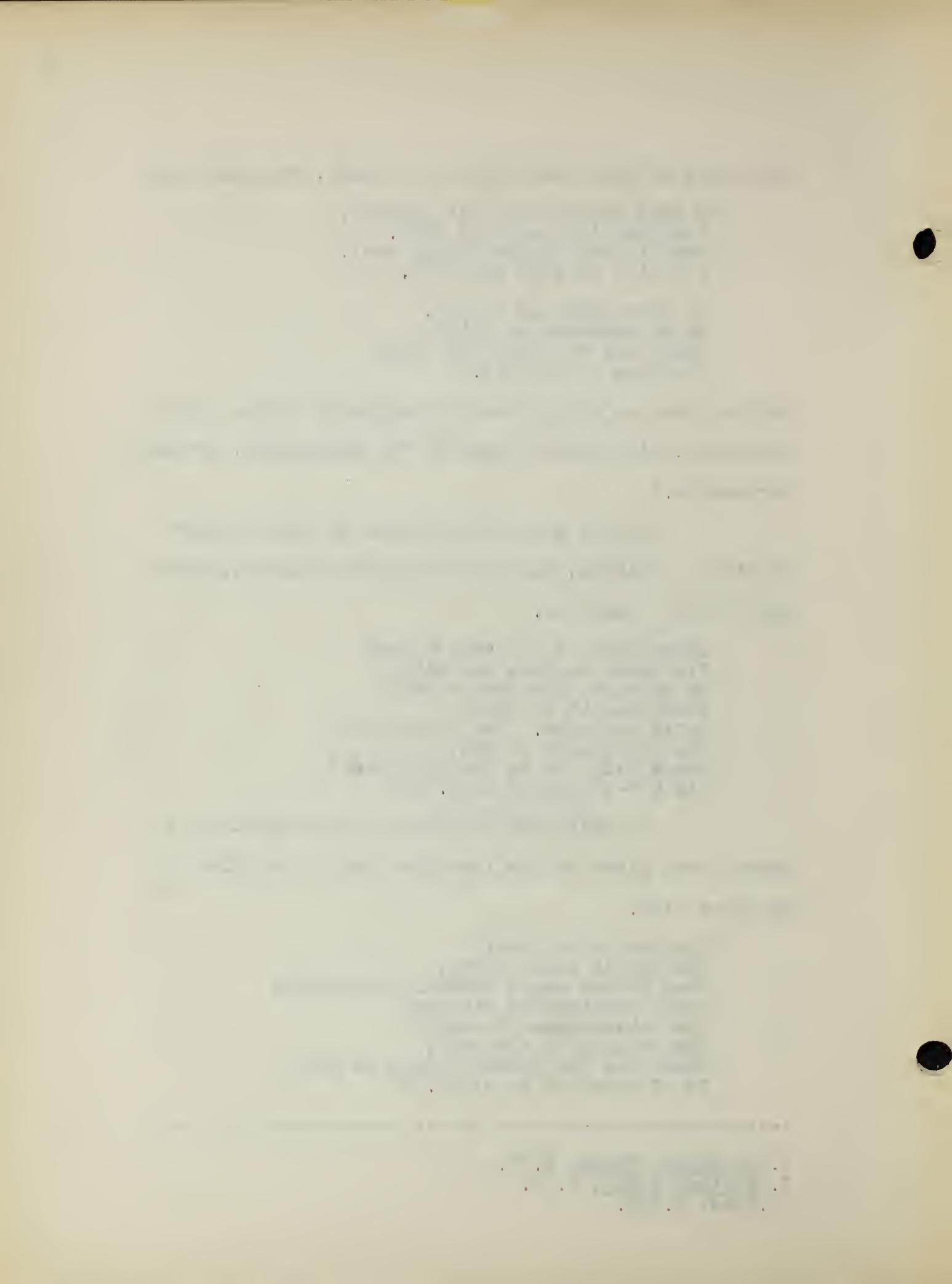
The Believing
In this poem the self is referred to as a spirit, and gives us the idea that one is entitled to an inner life.

"Its Hour with itself
The Spirit never shows,
What terror would enthrall the street
Could countenance disclose
The subterranean freight,
The cellars of the soul,
Thank God the loudest place He made
Is licensed to be still!"³

1. Collected Poems, P.37.

2. Further Poems, P.18.

3. Ibid, P.124.



That the hardest battles of life are not the outward ones known to all, but are the fight with the soul, she firmly reiterates:

"The battle fought between the Soul
And No Man is the one
Of all the battles prevalent
By far the greater one.

No news of it is had abroad;
Its bodiless campaign
Establishes, and terminates,
Invisible, Unknown.

Nor History record it,
As legions of a night
The sunrise scatters,-these
Endure,
Enact, and terminate."¹

The value of solitude and the cultivation of the inner life is further seen in this poem:

"The Soul's superior instants
Occur to her alone,
When friend and earth's occasion
Have infinite withdrawn.

Or she, Herself, ascended
To too remote a height,
For lower recognition
Than Her Omnipotent.

This mortal abolition
Is seldom, but as fair
As Apparition - subject
To autocratic air.

Eternity's disclosure
To favorites, a few,
Of the Colossal substance
Of immortality."²

Although this poet loved solitude, yet she found the minds of folks distilling,

1. Further Poems, P.165.
2. Ibid, P.12.

".....amazing sense
From ordinary meanings."¹

which gave value to herself, as she communed with them,

"Strong draughts of their refreshing minds
To drink, enables mine
Through desert or the wilderness,
As bore it sealed wine -
To go elastic, or as One
The camel's trait attained,
How powerful the stimulus
Of an hermetic mind."²

The influence of one personality on another
that enables one person to lift another was seen in her
letters. It is again portrayed in

"I rose because he sank,
I thought it would be opposite,
But when his power bent,
My Soul stood straight.
I told him Best must pass
Through this low arch of
Flesh;
No casque so brave
It spurns the grave -
I told him worlds I knew
Where monarchs grew
Who recollects us
If we were true.
And so with thews of hymn
And sinews from within,
In ways I knew not that
I knew, till then -
I lifted him."³

This same thought of the reaction of personalities is
again seen in:

"I make this crescent fill or lack,
His nature is at full
Or quarter - as I signify,
His tides do I control.

1. Collected Poems, P.268.
2. Further Poems, P.13.
3. Ibid. P.93.

He holds superior in the sky
 Or gropes at my command
 Behind inferior clouds,
 Or round a mist's slow colonnade.

But since we hold a mutual disc
 And from a mutual day,
 Which is the despot neither knows -
 Nor whose the tyranny."¹

One of Miss Dickinson's letters showed disappointment that a friend could not visit her as she had anticipated. That friends are a delight when they remain with one, is to be seen in the following poem:

"Are friends delight or pain?
 Could bounty but remain
 Riches were good.

But if they only stay
 Bolder to fly away,
 Riches are sad."²

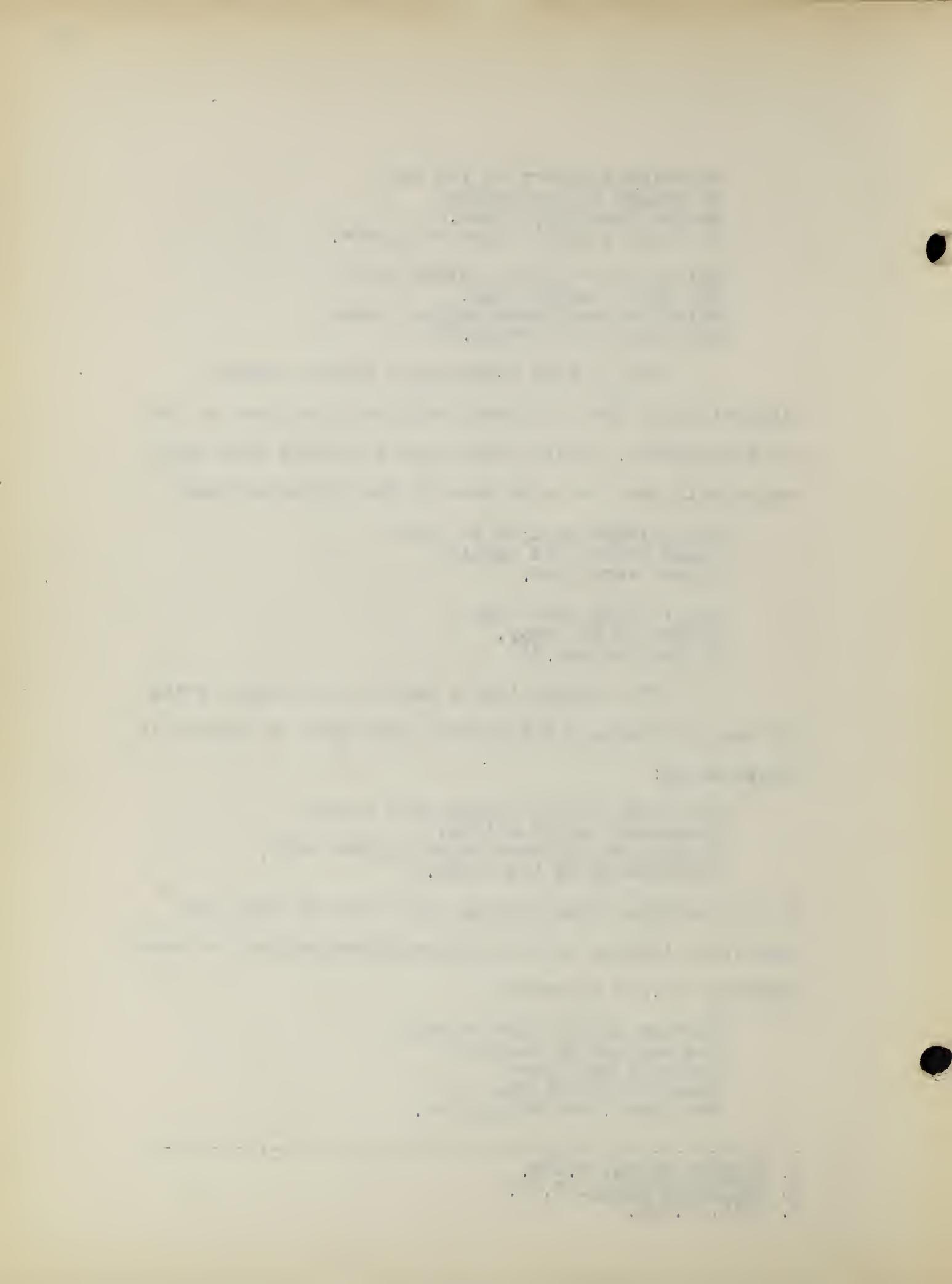
The thought that a person is a social being and that in losing a friend one loses part of himself is reflected in:

"Each that we lose takes part of us;
 A crescent still abides,
 Which like the moon, some turbid night,
 Is summoned by the tides."³

In the following poem written about the man whom she loved, the idea of the two selves intermingling yet never becoming one, is expressed:

"Forever at his side to walk
 The smaller of the two,
 Brain of his brain,
 Blood of his blood,
 Two lives, one Being, now.

1. Further Poems, P.139.
 2. Collected Poems, P.60.
 3. Ibid. P.231.



Forever of his fate to taste,
 If grief the largest part,
 If joy, to put my piece away
 For that beloved heart.
 All life to know each other -
 Whom we can never learn,
 And by and by a change
 Called "Heaven" -

Rapt neighborhood of men
 Just finding out what
 Puzzled us
 Without the lexicon!"¹

The idea that our selves can grow and develop
 is expressed in this poem:

We never know how high we are
 Till we are called to rise;
 And then, if we are true to plan,
 Our statures touch the skies.

The heroism we recite
 Would be a daily thing,
 Did not ourselves the cubits dwarf
 For fear to be a king."²

One person often enables another to catch glimpses of a
 larger life and seek new freedom.

"I showed her heights she never saw -
 'Wouldst climb?' I said,
 She said 'Not so' -
 'With me?' I said, 'With me?'
 I showed secrets
 Morning's nest,
 The rope that Nights were put across -
 And now, 'Wouldst have me for a guest?'
 She could not find her yes -
 And then I brake my life, and Lo!
 A light for her did solemn glow,
 The larger as her face withdrew -
 And could she, further, 'No'?"³

This little poem is perhaps one of the most
 famous of all Emily Dickinson's poems. It seems to

1. Further Poems, P.148.
2. Collected Poems, P.53.
3. Ibid, P.308.

summarize her philosophy of life. She is not content in living just for herself but has only truly lived when she has helped some one else bear their burden. Her personalistic tendency is evident in the fact that the individual is a social being and develops as one shares experiences.

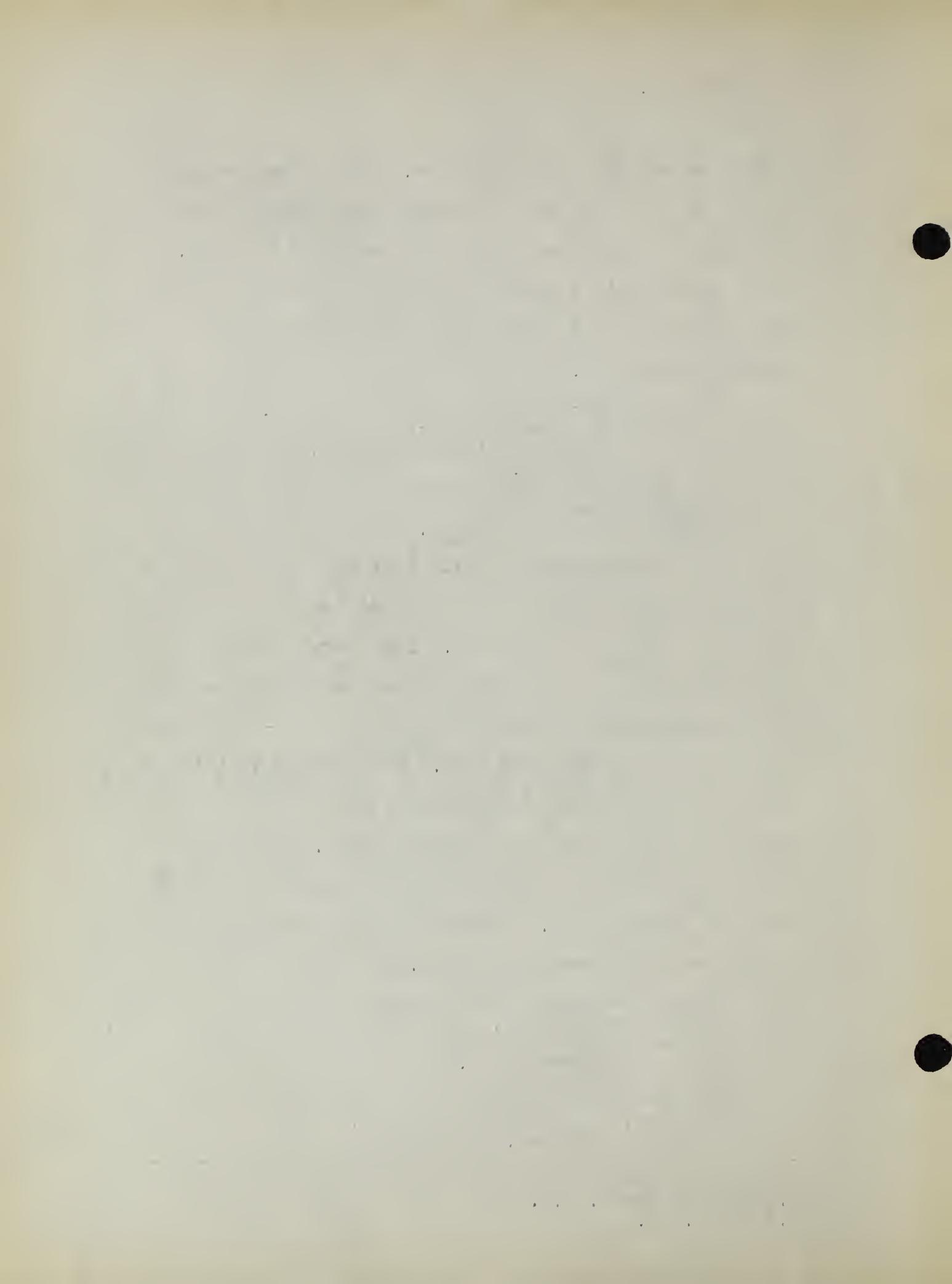
"If I can stop one heart from breaking,
I shall not live in vain;
If I can ease one life the aching,
Or cool one pain,
Or help one fainting robin
Unto his nest again,
I shall not live in vain."¹

We have seen in the life and letters of Miss Dickinson that to her there was a God behind the beauty IDEA OF THE WORLD in nature. The stars, the birds, the flowers she loved spoke to her of a Creator, greater than the works he had made - a God who had a plan and purpose in view. We shall see if this personalistic view of an immanent spirit in the universe is reflected also in her poetry. Nature, in her different aspects reveals a God behind the universe who is a cosmic force. The One who made the starry heavens she addresses as "Father."

"Lightly stepped a yellow star
To its lofty place,
Loosed the Moon her silver hat
From her lustral face.
All of evening softly lit
As an astral hall -
'Father,' I observed to Heaven,
'You are punctual.'"²

1. Collected Poems. P.6.

2. Ibid, P.279.



The next poem further emphasizes the fact that the God she believed in was One of plan and purpose.

"All circumstances are the frame
In which His Face is set
All latitudes exist for His
Sufficient continent.

The light His action the dark
The Leisure of His will,
In Him, Existence serve or set
A force illegible."¹

Emily did not find it essential to worship God in a church but found communion with God through the great out-of-doors. She dearly loved Nature. Heaven was not the future life, but the present instant.

"The skies can't keep their secret!
They tell it to the hills -
The hills just tell the orchards -
And they the daffodils!

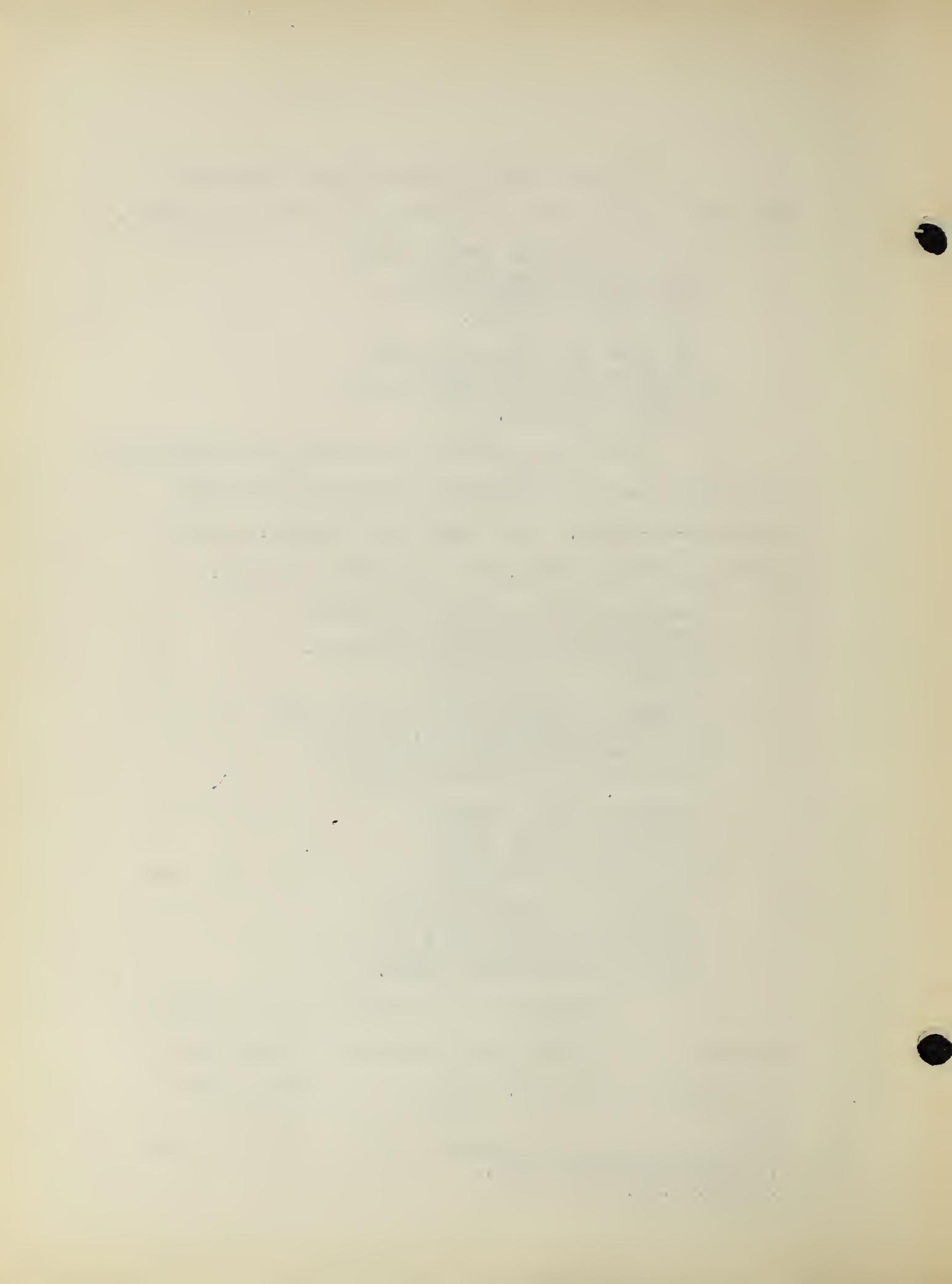
A bird, by chance, that goes that way
Hast overheard the whole.
If I should bribe the little bird,
Who knows but she would tell?

I think I won't, however,
It's finer not to know;
If summer were an axiom,
What sorcery had snow?

So keep your secret, Father!
I would not, if I could,
Know what the sapphires fellows so,
In your new-fashioned world."²

The poet seems to realize that the world is maintained by an ever living active will, whose laws we do not fully understand. This is to be seen in the poem:

1. Collected Poems, P. 314.
2. Ibid, P. 86.



"An altered look about the hills;
 A Tyrian light the village fills;
 A wider sunrise in the dawn;
 A deeper twilight on the lawn;
 A print of a vermillion foot;
 A purple finger on the slope;
 A flippant fly upon the pane;
 A spider at his trade again;
 An added strut in chanticleer;
 A flower expected everywhere;
 An axe shrill singing in the woods;
 Fern-odors on untraveled roads, -
 A furtive look you know as well,
 And Nicodemus' mystery
 Receives its annual reply."¹

This poem further develops the idea that God is revealing Himself in the world through nature. God speaks to men through spirituality, revealed in his messengers - the flowers, insects, and birds. In this way Nicodemus' question regarding rebirth is answered.

Thus we see that her poems which reveal this idea of a God-filled world are many. It seems almost a sacrilege to stop here, but there still remains the metaphysical poems of Miss Dickinson, in which we find her idea of God, and her belief in immortality.

Before going to them however, we would do her a great injustice if we did not mention a few of her poems which prove our point without proof.

AN IDEALIST

They are lovely for their sheer delicacy of lining, for the perfect exquisiteness of expression - and that alone gives them a place in immortality, and gives us a deeper belief in the idealism of the poet.

Sheer beauty is to be accepted on the only merit it has to offer, which is after all the greatest - its beauty.

This beauty is to be found preeminently in her love poems.

"I took one draught of life,
I'll tell you what I paid,
Precisely an existence -
The market price, they said.

They weighed me, dust by dust,
They balanced film with film,
Then paddled me my being's worth -
A single dram of Heaven."¹

To the earth-bound, a "single dram of Heaven" is all that we can stand!

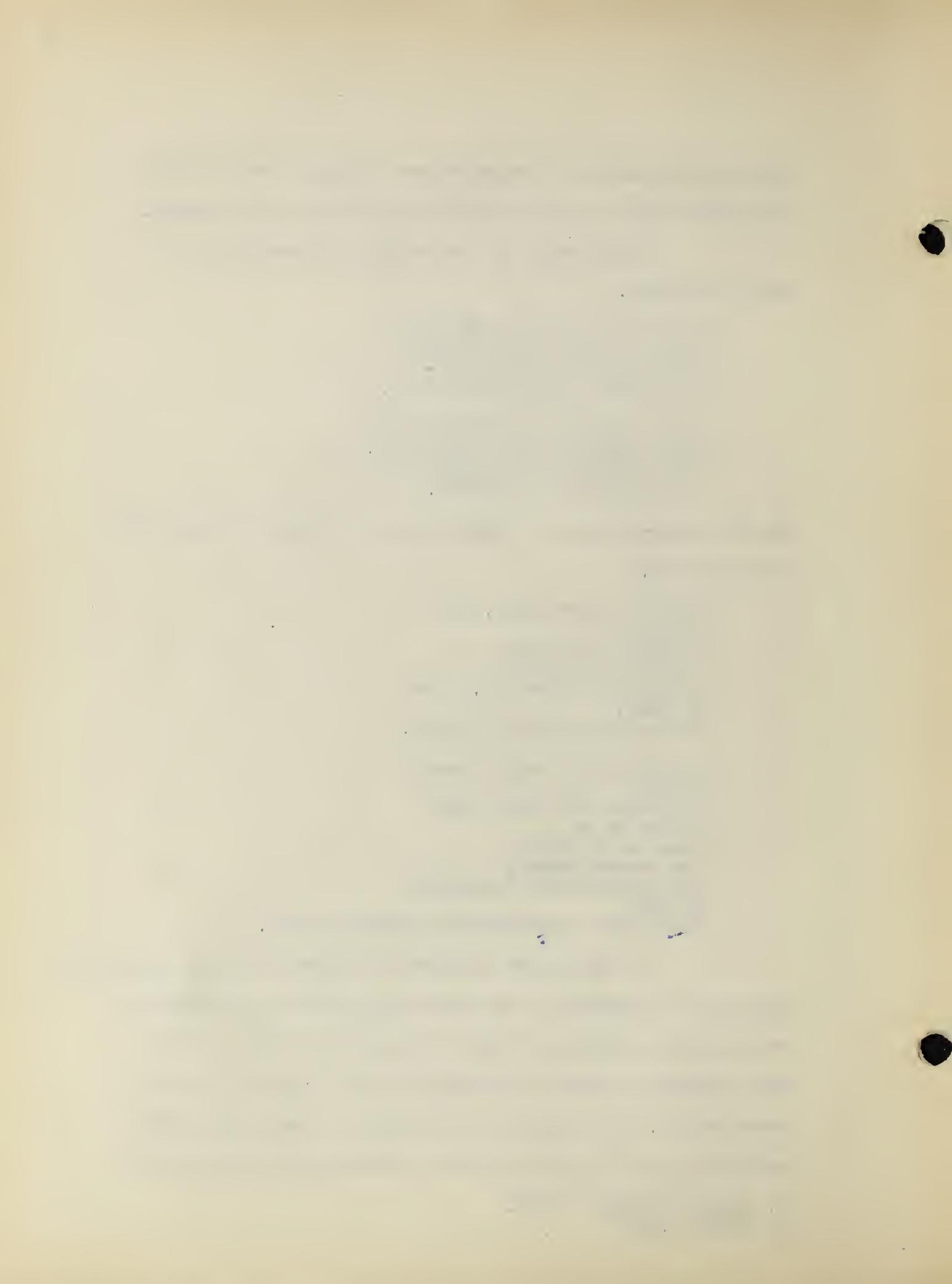
"Why do I love thee, Sir?
Because -
The wind does not
Require the grass
To answer wherefore, when
He pass,
She cannot keep her place.

The lightning, never asked
An eye
Wherefore she shut when
He was by -
Because he knows
he cannot speak,
And reasons not contained
Of talk
There be - preferred by daintier folk."²

As the years went on, she more and more identified love and immortality, and love became for her symbolized by the Great Lover, so that at the end of life, we find her speaking of God and immortality and love all in the same breath. This leads us directly to her poems which

1. *Further Poems*, p. 135.

2. *Ibid.* p. 153.



bring out clearly what she thought of God and the future life.

Miss Dickinson did not believe in the Puritanical God of her day. To her, God was not a being far off. We have seen in her letters IDEA OF GOD that to her God was a person, one she felt at home with and knew could understand her as a comrade and a friend. We shall look for this personalistic idea of God to be further substantiated in her poetry, in which she had ^{Wrote} written much regarding God and immortality.

She could approach God easier than her own earthly father. It was this that made certain critics brand her as irreligious. Take for example that outstanding bit of familiarity with God, in which she says:

"I never lost as much but twice,
And that was in the sod;
Twice have I stood a beggar
Before the door of God!"

Angels, twice descending,
Reimbursed my store.
Burglar, banker, father.
I am poor once more!"¹

In still another poem she refers to him as neighbor, which further illustrates the idea of perfect freedom and understanding which existed.² God to her was real and vivid. In the following poem she addresses God as "Father" and brings him her most cherished gift to hold. This

1. Collected Poems, P.201.
2. Cf. Collected Poems, P.179; Further Poems, P.41.
Life and Letters, P.137.

seems to prove that she had confronted him and had confidence and utter belief in his interest and care.

"Father, I bring thee not myself,-
That were the little load;
I bring thee the imperial heart
I had not strength to hold.

The heart I cherished in my own
Till mine too heavy grew,
Yet, strangest, heavier since it went,
Is it too large for you?¹

The following lines also show that she thinks of God as near at hand and that love was a means of comradeship.

"Who has not found the Heaven below
Will fail of it above.
God's residence is next to mine,
His furniture is love."²

Miss Dickinson believed in those times of solitude when she communed with God. It was a time when one person communed with another person. Spirit spoke to spirit and the result was happiness and consecration:

"I have a king who does not speak;
So, wondering, thro' the hours meek
I trudge the day away,-
Half glad when it is night and sleep,
If, haply, thro' a dream to peep
In parlors shut by day.

And if I do, when morning comes,
It is as if a hundred drums
Did round my pillow roll,
And shouts fill all my childish sky,
And bells keep saying 'Victory'
From steeples in my soul!

1. Complete Poems, P.172.

2. Ibid, P.54.-----

And if I don't, the little Bird
 Within the Orchard is not heard,
 And I omit to pray,
 "Father, thy will be done" today,
 For my will goes the other way,
 And it were perjury!"¹

In another poem she refers to God as a lover,
 thus giving further evidence to the supposition that to
 her God was indeed a person.

"God is a distant, stately lover,
 Woos, so He tells us, by His Son.
 Surely a vicarious courtship!
 Miles' and Priscilla's such a one.
 But lest the soul, like fair Priscilla,
 Choose the envoy and spurn the Groom,
 Vouches, with hyperbolic archness,
 Miles and John Alden
 Are synonym."²

There is a deep understanding there of the Trinity, which
 Miss Dickinson half hides in the midst of her humor.

There is a bit of comfort in her thought that
 God sees not the imperfect act, but the more perfect
 thought behind it.

"Not what we did shall be the test
 When act and will are done,
 But what our Lord infers we would-
 Have we diviner been."³

That eternity enables one to endeavor again and carry on
 what cannot be accomplished in this world, she admits,
 Life to her seems to be a striving toward some goal.

"Each life converges to some center
 Expressed or still!
 Exists in every human nature
 A goal,

1. Complete Poems, P.63.
2. Further Poems, P.198.
3. Ibid, P.193.

Admitted scarcely to itself, it may be,
 Too fair
 For credibility's temerity
 To dare.

Adored with caution, as a brittle heaven,
 To reach
 Were hopeless as the rainbow's raiment
 To touch,

Yet persevered toward, surer for the distance;
 How high
 Unto the saints' slow diligence
 The sky!

Ungained, it may be, by a life's low venture,
 But then,
 Eternity enables the endeavoring
 Again."¹

While she often likens Heaven to things familiar, especially Nature, at the same time she realizes that it is a spiritual existence, beyond the limits of time and space. She so expresses it:

"We pray to Heaven,
 We prate of Heaven -
 Relate when neighbors die,
 At what o'clock to Heaven
 They fled.
 Who saw them wherefore fly?

Is Heaven a place, and Sky a face?
 Location's narrow way
 Is for ourselves;
 Unto the dead
 There's no geography."²

Although she does not know what Heaven is, the fact that Christ has gone on before gives her faith in immortality.

"Life is what we make it,
 Death we do not know;
 Christ's acquaintance with him
 Justifies him, though.

1. Complete Poems, P. 34.
 2. Further Poems, P. 48.

He would trust no stranger,
 Other could betray,
 Just His own endorsement
 That sufficeth me.

All the other distance
 He hath traversed first,
 No new mile remaineth
 Far as Paradise.

His sure feet preceding,
 Tender Pioneer -
 Base must be the cowards
 Dare not venture now.¹

She seems to understand and have an unusual sympathetic bond with Jesus. Even though this poem is not especially personalistic in its viewpoint it does show a deep sense of comradeship with Jesus, and hence with God.

Idealism of the highest type is reflected in these lines:

"So well that I can live without -
 I love Thee; then how well
 Is that?
 As well as Jesus?
 Prove it me
 That He loved men
 As I love Thee."²

There is real depth in the lines:

"Where Thou art - that is Home,
 Cashmere or Calvary -"³

Only an idealist could write after suffering as Emily did:

"Joy to have merited the pain
 To merit the release.
 Joy to have perished every step
 To compass Thee at last...."⁴

 1. Further Poems, P.48.

2. Ibid, P.168.

3. Ibid, P.154.

4. Ibid, P.178.

To Emily Dickinson, life was but a prelude to a larger life beyond. She lived it to its full - with its beauties that spoke of greater beauties - but she was ready and not afraid when the carriage came, not afraid, even though she was the only passenger.

"Because I could not stop for Death,
He kindly stopped for me;
The carriage held but just ourselves
And Immortality.

We slowly drove, he knew no haste,
And I had put away
My labor and my leisure too,
For his civility.

We passed the school where children played
At wrestling in a ring;
We passed the fields of gazing grain,
We passed the setting sun.

We pause before a house that seemed
A swelling of the ground;
The roof was scarcely visible,
The cornice but a mound.

Since then 'tis centuries, but each
Feels shorter than the day
I first surmised the horses' heads
Were toward eternity."¹

"Toward eternity" . . . and that knowledge was a surety. She did not know where it was, or what it was, but she was sure of the fact that it was. Her faith is one of the most outstanding of her qualities.

I never saw a moor,
I never saw the sea;
Yet know I how the heather looks,
And what a wave must be.

1. Collected Poems, Pl 194.

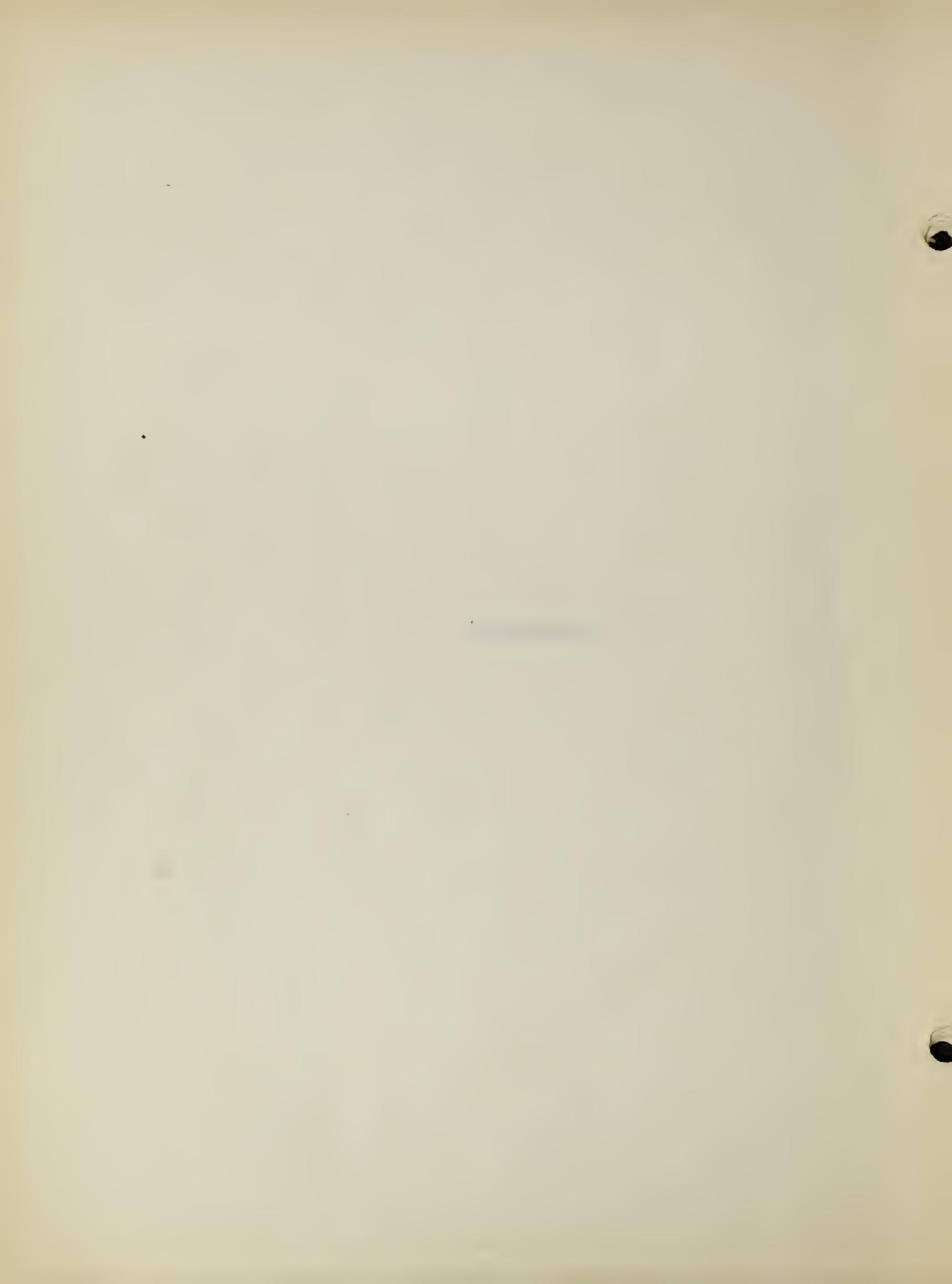
I never spoke with God,
Nor visited in Heaven;
Yet certain am I of the spot,
As if the chart were given.¹

In Emily Dickinson's poetry the characteristics that lead us to believe that she may be considered a personal idealist are more clearly seen than in her CONCLUSION life and letters. She realizes the essential value of the individual and that man has freedom of choice. It is the inner life that is important. The influence of persons on each other is strongly stressed and she believes that one person can help another to catch glimpses of a larger life and new freedom. God is revealed in the world through nature and the flowers, insects, and birds speak to her of a Father, a Creator behind and beyond the universe. God was to her a Lover proving that to her he was indeed a person.

Idealism of the highest type is reflected in her love poems. She believed in immortality, and was sure of it because Christ had gone one before. On the evidence of her poetry alone Emily Dickinson is seen to be sympathetic with many of the ideas and values of personalism.

1. Complete Poems. P.188.

CONCLUSION



In this thesis we have endeavored to prove that Emily Dickinson was a personal idealist in her philosophy. In the first chapter we laid down the main principles of personalism and indicated in subsequent chapters how these main personalistic ideas regarding a person, the world, and God were reflected in her life, letters, and poetry.

Emily Dickinson believed in the supreme value of the individual. Personality had a dignity that lent awe to her. A person was a spirit and everyone had a right to an inner life. A person, she maintains, is causative, separate, and has freedom of choice. Although Miss Dickinson developed her own inner life to an unusual degree yet she gained insight by contacts with her family and friends. She fully testifies to the inspiration she received from other personalities that enabled her to live her fullest life. While two souls may intermingle she realizes that they always remain separate identities.

Miss Dickinson is an idealist in the highest sense of the term. All her life she sought for larger freedom and she reiterates the value of the human will. She demanded the right to happiness in her own way.

While Emily Dickinson loved nature in an unusual degree it was the Creator behind the Universe

that she worshiped. Nature revealed to her a God who had a plan and purpose for the world, maintained by an ever active will. God to her was a person, a loving Father, a friend with whom she shared an intimate relationship.

He was the cosmic force behind the universe revealed to her through people and spirituality in flowers, insects, and birds. She believed in God absolutely and looked to immortality with assurance.

These characteristics that she has revealed are personalistic in their content. Therefore, we maintain that in her philosophy she may be considered a personal idealist or a personalist.

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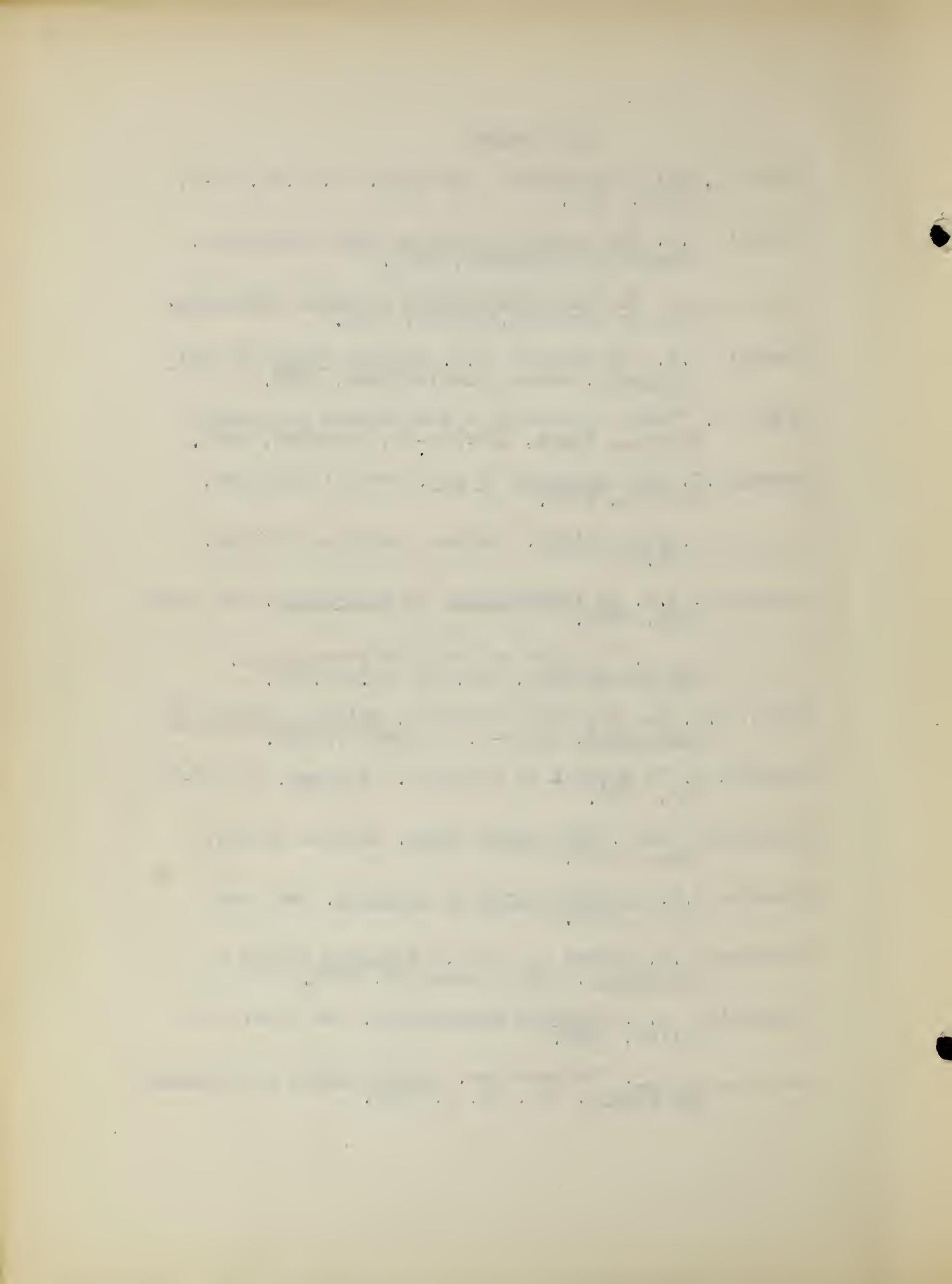
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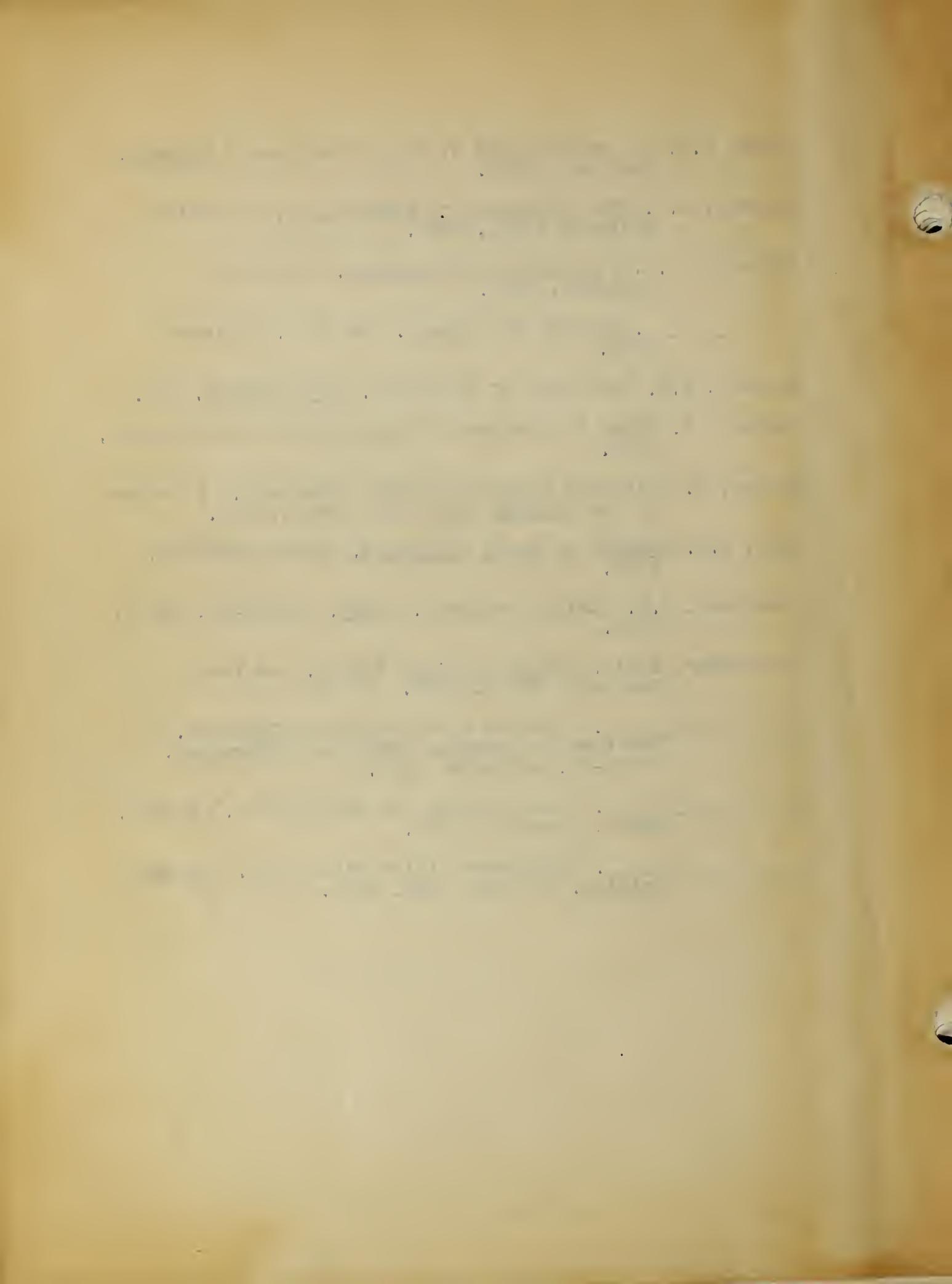
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